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A SUMMARY
OF
THE EVIDENCES
OF
CHRISTIANITY.

BY *K*
J. FAWCETT, A. M.

I HAVE WRITTEN BRIEFLY, EXHORTING AND TESTIFYING, THAT THIS
IS THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD WHEREIN YE STAND. *PETRA.*

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EVIDENCES
OF CHRISTIANITY.

INTRODUCTION.

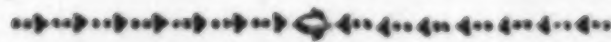
THE writer of this tract is aware that his labours, on this most important of all subjects, may, to some, appear to have been unnecessary. The arguments made use of for the support of the christian cause are very general; and little can be advanced on that head which has any just claim to originality. *Fabricius* has reckoned up some hundreds who have employed their pens in defence of revealed religion; and many able writers, since his time, have exerted their abilities with great success, in the same way.

But infidelity is now making a most alarming progress; and the author will think himself happy, if, through the divine blessing, his feeble efforts may be the means of establishing any in the faith, who have not the opportunity of consulting larger works; or of confirming any in that regard for the blessed gospel, which will be the best preservative against the baneful influence of the errors, the blasphemies, and the other abominations of the licentious age in which we live.

On a late public occasion, the author delivered a discourse on the Evidences of Christianity, from the words of king *Agrippa* to *Paul*, *Almost thou persuadest me to be a christian*. The ministers, and some others present, requested its publication, leaving him, however, at full liberty to enlarge and improve his plan at his own discretion. In compliance with this solicitation, after having consulted many volumes on the subject, he has, in addition to his own, adopted, without scruple, such thoughts and expressions as appeared to him most striking and conclusive. It will be of little consequence to the writer, though he should be condemned on this account for barrenness of thought, or poverty of genius, provided the arguments made use of are solid and substantial in themselves, and may serve to settle the judgment, interest the heart, and influence the life of any reader. The cause has been clearly and fully handled by a variety of authors of late; and the idle, trifling, profane and blasphemous attacks of its enemies, coolly and judiciously repelled; especially by Dr. *Watson*, whose excellent *Apology for the Bible*, as he modestly calls it, has already been of very great service to many, and, it is hoped, will be read with advantage by many more. May the divine blessing attend his servants in all their labours, whether great or small, for the spiritual and eternal profit of immortal souls!

The plan of this treatise is as follows:—Evidences which might rationally be expected in favour of christianity.—The evidence arising from the credibility of what is contained in the scriptures, and from the characters and qualifications of some of the writers of them.—The evidence arising from

from the concurring testimony of heathen writers.—
 The evidence arising from the prevalence of the
 cause, amidst great opposition, though promoted
 by means which in themselves might appear in-
 adequate. — The evidence arising from the perle-
 cution which the primitive christians endured for
 their religion.—Concluding remarks.



CHAP. I.

*Evidences which might rationally be expected in
 Favour of Christianity.*

THOSE persons who never set themselves
 heartily and in earnest to inquire into the truth
 of christianity; those who secretly wish it may not
 be true; and those who are less attentive to evi-
 dence than to difficulties, and regard objections
 more than what is said in answer to them, cannot
 be thought in a likely way to discern the strength
 of those arguments which are made use of in sup-
 port of the cause. There is, without doubt, great
 propriety in what the gracious Redeemer has said,
 “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the
 doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak
 of myself.” A mind open to conviction is of great
 importance.

Let me entreat the reader, when he takes up this
 little tract into his hands, to consider within him-
 self, what evidences of the truth of christianity he
 could wish to have. If he cannot suddenly answer

that inquiry, let him stop, and deliberate upon it. Let him consult his books; let him ask his friends. Let him make his demands as large and extensive as he can. And whatever rational evidence he may be pleased to require, I flatter myself it may be given him. The glorious Author of our being, on a subject of such moment as this, has been graciously pleased to afford us all the credentials which we can, in reason, expect, or even desire. The reader's serious attention is requested to the following particulars.

In a revelation which comes from God to men, it might perhaps be reasonable to expect some account of the original formation of that world in which we find ourselves placed. The wisest heathens were utterly at a loss on this subject. They could not determine how the universe came into existence, whether it were by chance, or by a concourse of atoms jumbled together just as it happened; or whether it were not eternal and self-existent. But no sooner do we open the Bible than we meet with sufficient information respecting this. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth." He had but to speak, and it was done, to give commandment, and it was established. "Let there be light, and there was light; let there be a firmament, and there was a firmament;" let there be a world, and the world, with its vast variety of furniture, decorations and ornaments, rose into existence. It appears, however, that a consultation was held in heaven, respecting the formation of
man,

man, who was to be lord of the creation. "Let us," said the Father to his Eternal Son and Holy Spirit, who with him are the one true and living God, the object of all worship and obedience, "let us make man in our image, after our likeness. So God created man in his own image;" which certainly must imply intelligence, rectitude and purity; "in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them."

It is reasonable to suppose, that in a revelation of the divine will to man, we should find some account of the origin of evil. This has long been a subject of inquiry and disputation in the schools of philosophy. It has been asked again and again, For what reason is it, that human life is filled with such a vast variety of afflictions and miseries? Why is the only thinking being on this globe doomed to pass his time, from youth to old age, either in fearing or suffering calamities?

If the mere light of nature, if what is called philosophy can give no satisfactory answer to these inquiries, it is to be supposed, that the divine book in which God himself is represented as unfolding his whole mind to his creature man, must furnish out the needful information. And so indeed it does. It teaches us, that though the original state of man was a state of innocence, and, by just consequence, a state of happiness, yet now it is otherwise. Man apostatised from his Maker, and sin and misery were produced together.

'Take in the whole of the prospect, says a modern writer, * view man in every age, and climate, and nation; in every condition and period of society.

* *Mr. Wilberforce.*

ciety. Where now do you discover the characters of his exalted nature? "How is the gold become dim, and the fine gold changed?" How is his reason clouded? How are his affections perverted, how is his conscience stupified! How do anger, and envy, and hatred, and revenge spring up in his wretched bosom! How is he enslaved to the meanest of his appetites! What fatal propensities does he discover to evil! What inaptitude to good!

Dwell awhile on the state of the ancient world; not merely on that benighted part of it, where all lay buried in brutish ignorance and barbarism, but on the seats of civilized and polished nations, on the empire of taste, and learning, and philosophy; yet in these chosen regions, with whatever lustre the sun of science poured forth its rays, the moral darkness was so thick that "it might be felt." Behold their sottish idolatries, their absurd superstitions, their want of natural affection, their brutal excesses, their unfeeling oppression, their savage cruelty! Look not to the illiterate and the vulgar, but to the learned and refined. Form not your ideas from the conduct of the less restrained and more licentious; you will turn away with disgust and shame from the allowed and familiar habits of the decent and the moral. *St. Paul* best states the facts, and furnishes the explanation; "Because they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, he gave them over to a reprobate mind."

But you give up the heathen nations as indefensible, and wish rather to form your estimate of man from a view of countries which have been blessed with the light of revelation.

True it is, and with joy let us record the confession, christianity has set the general tone of
morals

morals much higher than it was ever known in the pagan world. She has every where improved the character, and multiplied the comforts of society, particularly to the poor and the weak, whom from the beginning she professed to take under her patronage. Like her divine Author, "who sends his rain on the evil and on the good," she showers down unnumbered blessings on thousands who profit from her bounty, while they forget or deny her power, and set at nought her authority. Yet even in this more favoured situation, we shall discover too many lamentable proofs of the depravity of man. Nay, this depravity will now become even more apparent, and less deniable.

For what bars does it not now overleap? Over what motives is it not now victorious? Consider well the superior light and advantages which we enjoy, and then appreciate the superior obligations which are imposed on us. Consider in how many cases our evil propensities are now kept from breaking forth, by the superior restraints under which vice is laid by positive laws, and by the amended standard of public opinion.'

Man is then brought, by his own dreadful apostasy, into a state of sin and misery. Of this we have the fullest and clearest account in the scriptures, and this account is confirmed by matter of fact; by what we feel in ourselves and every where see in others. "We were shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin. We are all as an unclean thing. We are by nature children of wrath. We ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the

the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Such is the picture of human nature in its present depraved state, exhibited in various parts of the sacred volume. Hence that deluge of crimes, and the consequent train of miseries, afflictions and calamities with which the world is overspread in every part, and at every period of time.

It may appear strange to some, that this humiliating view of the human race should be introduced on the present occasion. 'What relation,' it may be said, 'has all this to the subject under consideration?' To which I answer, The guilt and misery of mankind alone could make such a system necessary as that for which we plead; nor can the suitableness and propriety of that system be understood, without some knowledge of the lapsed and ruined state of man. The gospel is glad tidings of salvation to those who have destroyed themselves, and are utterly helpless. I therefore consider the large and particular account of the guilt and misery of mankind, given us in the scriptures, and confirmed by experience and matter of fact, as one evidence of the truth of christianity. Every doctrine of the gospel supposes what we have been briefly stating. The whole œconomy of redemption implies, that there was an absolute necessity for such a remedy. I therefore add,

It is reasonable to suppose that in a revelation of God to men, some early intimations should be given of a method of recovery. And no sooner had the parent of the human race involved himself and his posterity in guilt and misery, than a gracious declaration was given, relating to a happy restoration, by the seed of the woman, who should bruise the
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serpent's head. This declaration was mysterious, but clearer discoveries were gradually made to the patriarchs and the prophets; till at last, the inspired writers spoke of the coming Messiah in terms so strong, lively and descriptive, that they might seem almost to have beheld him with their eyes, and been witnesses to his transactions.

The time of his coming was signified in several ancient predictions. He was to make his appearance before the government ceased in the tribe of *Judah*, while the second temple was standing, and a little before its destruction. *Daniel's* prophecy of seventy weeks of years fixed the period of this mighty Deliverer's advent. Four hundred and ninety years after the commandment was given to build *Jerusalem*, this great event was to take place. This command was issued out in the seventh year of *Artaxerxes Longimanus*, or at least very near that period.

It was foretold that he should be of the seed of *Abraham*; that he should be born of a virgin; "a virgin shall conceive and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name *Immanuel*." He should be of the house of *David*, and the place of his birth should be *Bethlehem*; which name signifies, the house of bread. It was predicted, that on account of his low and mean appearance he should be despised, rejected and insulted by the *Jews*.

Yet the dignity of his person was clearly signified in prophecy. "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." The offices he sustains were pointed out; "a prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you;—him shall ye hear in all things which he shall say unto you."

you. A king shall reign in righteousness. Thou art a priest for ever after the order of *Melchisedec*."

The sufferings he should undergo were particularly foretold. He should be wounded, bruised, stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. He should be brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and be dumb as a sheep before her shearers. He was to give his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and not to hide his face from shame and spitting. His hands and his feet were to be pierced. Gall and vinegar were to be presented to him. His garments were to be parted among the soldiers, and a lot cast for his vesture. He should make his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; which intended his being crucified between two thieves, and buried in a rich man's tomb. His side was to be pierced on the cross, but none of his bones were to be broken.

It was foretold that he should rise again from the dead, and not see corruption; that he should be received up to heaven, and there seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, till all his enemies be made his footstool; that he should pour forth his Spirit on his followers, and give great success to the labours of his ministers; so that though the *Jews* should persist in their unbelief, the Gentiles should be brought to the knowledge of his salvation.

With what punctuality and exactness all these predictions received their accomplishment, in the birth, the life, the sufferings, the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, needs not be told. Every one who carefully peruses the New Testament must observe it. The evangelists constantly remind us of what was foretold concerning Jesus, and how it was fulfilled.

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It is reasonable to suppose, that some means should be used to keep the promised Saviour in view, before the period of his actual appearance on earth. And we find wonderful provision made for this purpose through the whole œconomy of the former dispensation, to keep the faith and hope of the Old Testament saints alive, respecting the glorious redemption to be obtained by the Messiah.

The institution of the paschal lamb had a particular reference to him who is the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. By the morning and evening sacrifices the Redeemer was every day held forth to the people, as one who should come in the end of the world to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. To what purpose was the slaying of so many thousand victims, the shedding of so much blood, and the burning of so much flesh, but to point out the atonement which was to be made by him, whose blood cleanseth from all sin, and without the shedding of which there would have been no remission? These were shadows of things to come, but the body is Christ.

The Jewish priesthood itself was typical of Christ. Almost every thing under that dispensation was significant of that eternal redemption which was to be obtained for us. The eating of blood was solemnly prohibited, because it is the price of the soul. The sin-offerings, the peace-offerings, the great day of atonement, the year of jubilee, and all the legal purifications to be daily and constantly observed, were wisely and graciously ordained for the purposes mentioned above. Without this reference, they were insignificant and unmeaning services; but as by them the gospel and its glorious blessings were held forth to the penitent and believing *Israel-*
B *ites,*

ites, they were wise, suitable and gracious institutions, and every way worthy of him who ordained them.

It might perhaps be reasonable to suppose, that God would give some testimony from heaven of the truth of that religion which it was his will to establish in the world. And this we find was actually the case. The Almighty afforded to his ancient professing people repeated and redoubled indications, that their religion was from him. Such were the wonders frequently wrought among them; their Urim and Thummim; their frequent oracles; their succession of prophets, whose predictions respecting the *Jews* themselves, and the neighbouring nations, were continually fulfilling before their eyes.

Of miracles, the number was great; in *Egypt*, at the *Red Sea*, and through the wilderness. The manna, the cloudy pillar, and the water which flowed from the smitten rock, to supply their thirsty tribes in all their wanderings, were constant miracles, in which the hand of Omnipotence was most apparent. For the revival of the declining cause of religion, many years after, God raised up his servants *Elijah* and *Elisha*, and wrought many wonders by them. Were not all these instances so many evidences of the truth of that revelation on which the gospel system is founded?

It might be supposed, that as the time was fixed in prophecy for the Saviour's appearance, his coming would be expected. And so we find it was.

When the time of his entrance on the stage of the world drew nigh, there was a general expectation among the *Jews* of his coming. The pious and faithful waited for the consolation of *Israel*,
looked

looked for redemption in *Jerusalem*, and thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. Some of the chief priests and scribes were of this number; for when *John* the Baptist entered on his ministry, the *Jews* sent priests and Levites to ask him, whether he were the Christ. Even the woman of *Samaria*, though she belonged to a people with whom the *Jews* had no dealings, yet said, "I know that *Messias* cometh, who is called Christ; when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus said unto her, I that speak unto thee am he." The preaching of his harbinger was of so divine a nature, that all men mused in their hearts whether he were the Christ or not. And when Jesus had performed a variety of miracles, which evidently bespoke the exertion of Omnipotence, the question was proposed by some of the people, "When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than this man hath done? The coming of the *Messiah* was made an express article of the *Jewish* faith; the hope of his appearance was propagated from father to son; and the denial of it was deemed a most dangerous heresy, and a virtual renunciation of the authority and truth of the law of *Moses*.

It is evident also, from many authentic records, that in the eastern part of the world, and among the *Romans*, there was a notion, that some extraordinary person should arise, and rule the earth.

It might be expected, that the coming of this glorious person would be marked out with some wonderful events. The gospel history informs us that this was the case. A messenger from God was sent before him, to proclaim his approach. Of this messenger the prophet *Isaiah* thus spoke, many hundreds of years before he made his appearance.

“ The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high-way for our God. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” When the Eastern monarchs travelled, harbingers went before, to give notice that they were upon the road. Proper persons were employed to remove obstacles, and prepare their way. In like manner, when the King of kings, and Lord of lords is going to make his public appearance, his way must be prepared. Mountains of difficulty must be levelled into plains before him, and vallies must be filled up. The crooked ways must be made straight, and the rough places plain.

An angel is commissioned from heaven to give intelligence to the virgin, of the conception and birth of him whose name should be called JESUS, because he should save his people from their sins. *Joseph* was also favoured with the like information, perhaps by the same messenger. When the Redeemer was born, there were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night, and probably, at the same time, employed in divine contemplation, or in edifying discourse concerning the redemption of Israel; for they that feared the Lord spake often one to another of this great event; and the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. Lo! the angel of God came upon them, and the glory of the Most High shone round about them. And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of *David*, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And suddenly there was with the

the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men.

An unusual star appeared in the heavens, to give intimation to the Eastern sages that the Sun of righteousness was going to arise. They knew the sign, and guided by it to the place where the Prince of life was born, they came to pay their adorations to him, and to present their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Such were the circumstances which signalized this long-expected and most important of all events, the birth of Immanuel; and such the preparations made for his public appearance in the world. Nor should we forget what took place at his baptism. "For Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and lo! the heavens were opened unto him, and *John* saw the Spirit of God descending, like a dove, and lighting upon him. And lo! a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Thus the Author of christianity was distinguished, on his entrance into the world, with the most unequivocal attestations of Heaven.

We may reasonably suppose, that this divine Saviour should appear in all the beauty of unspotted purity and holiness. And so he did. But though I am charmed with the amiableness of his character, I feel myself unable fully to describe it. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. Love, meekness, patience, condescension and humility shone with the brightest lustre through his life, in his sufferings, and at his death. His Father's honour touched his heart, and zeal for his house, his laws and his worship, to use the em-

phatical language of scripture, did even eat him up. What diligence, what fervour of devotion, what contempt of the world, what compassion for the miseries of mankind, and what unwearied activity in relieving them, were apparent in his whole conduct! His days were spent in giving to the ignorant the instruction of life, and in healing all that were diseased; these were frequently succeeded by whole nights of intercession, supplication and thanksgiving. No defect, no failing, no impropriety was ever found in any part of his conduct. If we examine his whole life with the exactest scrutiny, from his poor manger to his bitter cross, we shall find that the law of his God was in his heart, and that none of his steps did slide. To his bitterest enemies he could say, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?"

'Go,' says Dr. *Sherlock*, 'go to your natural religion; lay before her *Mahomet* and his disciples, arrayed in armour and blood, riding in triumph over the spoils of thousands who fell by his victorious sword. Shew her the cities which he set in flames, the countries which he ravaged and destroyed, and the miserable distresses of all the inhabitants of the earth. When she has viewed him in this scene, carry her into his retirement; shew her the prophet's chamber; his concubines and his wives, and let her hear him allege revelation, and a divine commission, to justify his adultery and lust.

When she is tired with this prospect, then shew her the blessed Jesus, humble and meek, doing good to all the sons of men. Let her see him in his most retired privacies; let her follow him to the mount, and hear his devotions and supplications to his Father. Carry her to his table to view his
poor

poor fare; and hear his heavenly discourse. Let her attend him to the tribunal, and consider the patience with which he endured the scoffs and reproaches of his enemies. Lead her to his cross; let her view him in the agony of death, and hear his last prayer for his persecutors;—*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!* When natural religion has thus viewed both, ask her, Which is the prophet of God? But her answer we have already had, when she saw part of this scene, through the eyes of the Centurion, who attended at the cross. By him she spoke, and said, *Truly this man was the Son of God.*

It may be supposed that the Redeemer's mission would be attested by miracles. And the history of our Lord's public life will give us ample satisfaction on this head. He constantly appealed to his works, as convincing proofs of his being the promised Messiah. "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not."

He gave sight to those whose benighted eyes had never beheld the cheering light of day. The dumb, at his command, opened their joyful lips to speak his praise, and tell of his salvation. He unstopped the deaf ear, to hear the words of everlasting life from his mouth. He caused the lame man to leap as an hart, in transports of joy and gratitude. The leper, by his touch, was perfectly cleansed, and delivered from every symptom of his loathsome disease. Distempers indeed, of every kind, which mocked the force of medicine, and baffled the skill of the ablest physicians, fled at his rebuke. Diseases which were blended with the earliest seeds of life, and rivetted in the very constitution by long continuance, were effectually eradicated; and that

that not by tedious applications, painful operations, or expensive prescriptions; but in the twinkling of an eye, by a word from his lips, a touch from his hand, or even by the bare act of his will. Instances of this kind were not few and rare; but almost without number. The whole of his public ministry was filled up with an unintermitted series of those healing miracles, the least of which was enough to demonstrate his eternal power and godhead.

Bread was multiplied in the hands of him who is himself the bread of life. And when many thousands of hungry men had been fed and satisfied, much more was left than what was furnished at the beginning of the repast.

He walked serenely on the waves of the sea, as on a pavement of marble. When the swelling surges raged horribly, he spoke their most tempestuous agitations into perfect stillness. The boisterous winds heard his awful voice, and instantly obeyed their Sovereign's word. They were hushed into perfect silence, and there was a great calm.

He displayed his omnipotence in respect to those malignant beings, the Devils and his angels. At his command, they abandoned their conquests, and relinquished their habitations. They owned his sway, and were constrained to cry, "We know thee who thou art, thou Holy One of God; we beseech thee, torment us not." Whole legions of these fierce and indignant spirits were dispossessed by him, and driven to seek rest in desert places, or permitted to spend their rage on the most sordid brutes.

He

He raised the dead to life again. He opened the eyes, which, according to the course of nature, had been sealed in everlasting night. The heart, which had forgot its vital motion, at his command, resumed its former active spring. The crimson current, which was not only congealed by the cold hand of death, but changed to putrefaction, at his order began its wonderful circulation afresh through every vein. The departed soul, which had entered the regions of the invisible world, at the Redeemer's signal, returned to its tenement of clay.

When inquiry was made of him by the disciples of *John*, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" He referred them to his works. "Go and shew *John* again those things that ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who-soever shall not be offended in me."

These miracles were wrought in a public manner, before enemies and unbelievers; without any air of pride, vanity or ostentation, or the most distant prospect of obtaining worldly advantage.—They were performed in confirmation of doctrines the most interesting to mankind; they were very numerous; their effects were not transient, but permanent, and might be reviewed, and re-examined; as in the cases of those who were cured of dreadful diseases, and of those who were raised from the dead.* They had nothing fantastical or cruel

* *Quadratus*, who lived in the same age with *Poly carp*, a disciple of *John* the Divine, has left us the following remarkable testimony:

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cruel in them, but were all acts of kindness, mercy, or beneficence. They were such as the prophets had foretold that the Messiah should perform. And, in a word, they were significant, and expressive of the design of the Redeemer's coming into the world; which was to deliver us from the power and dominion of the prince of darkness; to give saving instruction to those who have been blinded by sin and the god of this world; to raise us from a death in sin, to a divine and spiritual life; to cure our souls of the leprosy of uncleanness, and of all the other maladies which sin has introduced into the various powers of our minds, that we may devote our whole selves, and our whole lives to the service and honour of God, in the most vigorous, chearful, thankful and active manner.

We may reasonably expect to find this Divine Messenger engaged in revealing his Father's will to mankind. And on the slightest review of the gospel history, we find that Jesus was thus employed from his entrance on his public life, to his finishing it, on the cross. He was the great prophet raised up^d like unto *Moses*, whom the people were to hear in all things that he should say unto them. He preached constantly to them, declaring the whole will of God to the sons of men. He could make his appeal to the Father, "I have preached

'The works of our Saviour were always conspicuous, for they were real; both on those that were healed and on those that were raised from the dead: who were seen, not only when they were healed or raised, but for a long time afterwards. Not only whilst he dwelt on this earth, but also after his departure, yea, for a good while after it; insomuch that some of them have reached to our times.'

preached righteousness in the great congregation. Lo! I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest, I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart. I have declared thy faithfulness, and thy salvation. I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation."

In the temple, in the synagogues, in the streets, in ships, in the wilderness, and on the mountains, he daily preached the gospel of the kingdom. He opened the law in its extent and spirituality, as we see in his sermon on the mount. He preached the joyful tidings of a glorious salvation from sin, guilt, condemnation and misery, by his death. "As *Moses* lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." He considered the people as his flock, and fed them with a shepherd's care, gathering the lambs with his arm, carrying them in his bosom, and gently leading those that are with young. "Come unto me," said he, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out."

He exercised the most tender compassion to the weak and the feeble, not breaking the bruised reed, nor quenching the smoking flax; but strengthening the weak hands, and confirming the feeble knees. The Spirit of the Lord God was upon him, because the Lord had anointed him to preach good tidings to the meek. He had sent him to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to
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open the prison to them that are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and to comfort all that mourn. The people wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, and exclaimed, "Never man spake like this man." The apostle tells the *Hebrews*, that God, who, at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers, by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds. The Author of our religion taught it with his own mouth, and made known the will of his Father to men.

We may probably suppose, that this Divine Messenger would give farther proofs of his being the true Messiah by foretelling future events. If we expect this kind of evidence, we are not disappointed. The blessed Redeemer clearly foretold remote contingencies, and discovered the secrets of futurity. The sacred historians have recorded many instances of this. As the treason of *Judas*, the fall of *Peter*, and the timid flight of all the disciples, in that gloomy night, when the Shepherd was to be smitten, and the sheep scattered; Jesus exactly predicted all these circumstances; together with the time and manner of his own death, the term of his continuance in the grave, and his glorious resurrection, and triumphant ascension into heaven. We find him also foretelling the divine inspiration, the mission, the miraculous powers, and wonderful success of his apostles. All these events took place as Jesus had said, and not one of his prophetic declarations failed of its accomplishment.

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He particularly foretold the destruction of *Jerusalem* by the *Romans*, the demolition of the temple, with the prodigies which preceded it, the tribulation which accompanied it, and the dispersion of the *Jewish* nation which followed upon it. Divine Providence so ordered it, that *Josephus*, a learned *Jew*, who was an eye-witness of the amazing desolation which was made on this occasion, should give a full and faithful narrative of the whole. What he records, we find to be an exact fulfilment of the twenty-fourth chapter of *Matthew*, and the twenty-first of *Luke*. Much might be said concerning the predictions of Jesus respecting those events which are now fulfilling before our eyes; as that the holy city, or the church, shall be trodden down of the *Gentiles*, until the time of the *Gentiles* be fulfilled. But I forbear. It is sufficient for my present purpose, to remark the prophecies of our Lord respecting the *Jews*.

Their temple, according to his prediction, was levelled to the ground; nor could the power and munificence of an Emperor, when exercised with a view to counteract the Redeemer's prophecy, renew the structure, or even remove the ruins of it, for the erection of another edifice. The *Jews* were overtaken by the severest judgments of the Almighty, and the blood of him whom they had crucified, was revenged on their children, and their country; while, to the present period, they continue to be the signal monuments of the truth of what he had said concerning them.

The *Jewish* nation and government were destroyed in a manner, exactly conformable to the predictions of Christ. The people, who survived the carnage, were carried away captive, and dispersed

perfed through the moft diftant countries ; in which ftate of difperfon they remain unto this day, as fo many living witneffes of the truth of christianity. While our hearts pity them on account of their blindnefs and ftupidity, we cannot but look on them with a kind of veneration. Wherever we fee a *Jew*, we fee an evidence of the truth of our holy religion.

They remain ftill a numerous people, united among themfelves, and diftinguifhed from the reft of the world, as they were in the days of *Mofes*, by the profeflion of his law. They are every where looked upon in a manner which fully confirms the prophetic account given of their prefent ftate fo many ages before ; “Thou fhalt become an aftonifhment, a proverb, and a by-word, among all nations whither the Lord fhall lead thee.” Their continuing in the circumftances in which they are known to be from age to age, and in different parts of the habitable globe, is little lefs than a ftanding miracle. *

Thus

* We have now in the *Jews*, a people, who of all mankind can be the leaft fufpected of partial favour towards us, lending their affiftance to fupport the christian caufe ; and by the zeal which they fhew for their law and their prophets, preferving, with the moft exaét fidelity, our evidences, and their own condemnation. Thofe who rejected and crucified our Lord, being offended at him, are the fame people with whom thofe writings ftill remain, which testify concerning him, and which affirm that he fhould be rejected by them, as a rock of offence. Thus has their refusal of him added an eminent mark to the truth of his credentials. He has been equally demonftrated to be the *Meffiah* by the believing part of the *Jewish* na-

Thus, Jesus delivered prophecies of events, which eternal wisdom alone could foresee, and which almighty power alone could bring to pass. From a system of religion, authenticated by such overpowering evidence, what unprejudiced inquirer can withhold his assent? Amongst the numerous varieties of plans which have been proposed to direct the belief, and influence the practice of mankind, where shall we find a system which can pretend to attestations in any degree equal to those we are now mentioning? Let the adversaries of christianity point out a religion that bears such visible impressions of an Almighty hand, ere they attempt to shake our faith in that which is our sovereign, and our only support, both in life and death.

It might be expected, that according to the predictions of the ancient prophets, the Saviour of men should suffer and die; that he should give his life a ransom for their souls; and that his death should be attended with some extraordinary events. The gospel history affords us ample satisfaction in these particulars. Jesus had signified repeatedly what was the end of his coming; that he was come not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many; that he was to lay down his life for the sheep; that he was to be lifted up upon the cross, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

All length the solemn, the all-important period arrived when that great sacrifice was to be offered,

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nation, who embraced him, and by the unbelieving, who despised him; the one event, no less than the other, having been long before prophetically declared.
Monf. Pascal.

the efficacy of which reaches back to the first transgression of man, and extends forward, not only to the end of time, but perfects for ever them that are sanctified and saved by it.

That guilt must be expiated by suffering, is a sentiment which has prevailed more or less, in the minds of thinking men of every age and nation. On this principle all government is founded, that public justice requires compensation for crimes. All forms of religion, whether among heathens, *Jews* or christians, proceed upon the belief, that, in order to the pardon of the sinner, atonement must be made to the justice of the Governor of the world. Hence the vast variety of sacrifices, offerings and expiations, which have been made in every corner of the earth. But the one sacrifice which the great Redeemer offered for sin, is that alone through which we can be saved. Here we see the forfeit of guilt paid by a divine personage in our behalf. Through this we are emboldened to look up with humble confidence to the Judge of all, as merciful to the guilty, as pardoning iniquity, transgression and sin; and as doing this in consistency with justice and order.

Behold, then, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world ! What was done legally by types, was in reality effected by him. He was stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. He died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. See him agonizing in the garden of *Gethsemane*; follow him to the court of *Herod*, to the judgment-hall of *Pilate*, and to the hill of *Calvary*. There see him nailed to the cross, made a curse for us, to redeem us from
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the curse of the law, and dying that we might live for ever.

By wonders in heaven, and wonders on earth, was this most interesting of all events distinguished. * All nature seemed to feel it; and the dead and the living bore witness to its importance. The veil of the temple was rent in twain. The earth shook. There was darkness over all the land. The graves were opened, and many who slept arose and went into the holy city. Nor were these the only prodigies of this awful hour. The most hardened hearts were subdued and changed. The judge, who, in order to gratify the multitude, passed sentence upon Jesus, publicly attested his innocence. The *Roman* centurion, who presided at the execution, glorified God, and acknowledged the sufferer to be more than man. *Truly*, said he, *this was the Son of God*.

The *Jewish* malefactor, who was crucified with Jesus, addressed him as the Lord of life and glory, and implored his favour. Even the crowd of insensible spectators, who had come forth as to a common show, and who had insulted him with clamours and out-cries, returned home, smiting their breasts. — Look back on the heroes, the philosophers, the legislators of old. View them in their last moments. Recal every circumstance which distinguished their departure from the world. Where can you find such an assemblage of great events, as concurred at the death of Christ? Where, so many testimonies given to the dignity of the dying person, by earth, and by heaven? Surely, christianity

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* *Blair's sermon, on the Death of Christ.*

tianity bears the divine signature most visibly upon it, in this, as well as in all other instances.

It might be expected, that Jesus would rise again from the dead, according to the scriptures, and that he would ascend in triumph to his Father. And these facts are clearly and strongly attested by the writers of the New Testament. In vain was the massy stone rolled to the door of the sepulchre; in vain was the seal affixed; in vain were the soldiers commanded to guard the sacred place where the body of Jesus was laid. At the appointed period, he burst the bars of death, because it was impossible for him to be holden of them. He was declared to be the Son of God with power, by his resurrection from the dead. The obstinate *Jews* put into the mouths of the *Roman* guards the most absurd story that ever was invented. They suborned them by the promise of money to say, "His disciples came, while we slept, and stole him away." They did not consider that this story confuted itself. For if the soldiers were all asleep, they could not know what was doing in the mean time; and if any of them were awake, they would soon have alarmed the rest, and prevented such an attempt.

The proofs of the Redeemer's resurrection are so full and convincing, that the apostle *Paul* does not scruple to risk the whole weight of the christian cause upon the evidence of this single fact, "If Christ be not risen, our preaching is vain, your faith is also vain, ye are yet in your sins. But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept."

Mr. *Locke* has reduced the highest proof of a matter of fact, which depends upon testimony, to the following particulars. — A sufficient number of
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witnesses; the integrity of those witnesses; their skill and understanding; their design; and the consistency of the parts and circumstances of the relation. Nothing can be more fair or more reasonable than these rules of judging concerning the authenticity of any historical relation; and it will be found, on the strictest inquiry, that the proofs of our Lord's resurrection are conformable to them all. The witnesses were numerous, they were every way qualified to give evidence in the case, they could have no inducement to impose on mankind, they had no motive or interest to incline them to falsify, nor could they possibly have succeeded if they had made the attempt. To all which we may add, the God of truth has manifestly stamped their report with the sanction of his own approbation. But there will be occasion to say more of this hereafter.

After Jesus had shewn himself alive from the dead to many infallible witnesses, he ascended up on high, leading captivity captive, and having received gifts for men, he entered triumphantly into the regions of glory, to appear in the presence of God for us.

It might be expected, that those who were living witnesses of all the Redeemer's transactions, and whom he had chosen for that purpose, should testify these things openly to the world. And this they did, with the greatest boldness and freedom, in the face of all dangers, amidst tides of opposition, and torrents of rage, raised against them by all ranks of people. Observe the spirit, mark the language of these champions in the christian cause, "Whether we should not obey God rather than men, judge ye. We cannot but speak the things which we have

have heard and seen." As if they had said, 'Prepare your tortures, open your prisons, bring your chains and your scourges, utter your threatenings, invent new methods of cruelty, do with us what you please, we must not, we dare not be awed into silence; we cannot hold our peace.'

Soon after the day of *Pentecost*, when some of them had been seized and threatened by the *Sanhedrim*, they were anointed with such an effusion of the Spirit, that the very house was shaken in which they were assembled to offer up their fervent devotions. Their prayers ascended to the divine throne with acceptance, while they said, respecting their opposers, "Now, Lord, behold their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word." They were afterwards led out of prison by an angel, who said to them, "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people, all the words of this life." Implying, that the whole life and happiness of men depended on their knowing and receiving this message. They were obedient to the heavenly vision, and spake the word of God with boldness.

It is reasonable to suppose, that these witnesses of the Redeemer's transactions should be qualified for the great work they had to do, and supported in it. Accordingly, we find it recorded in that excellent and useful book called *The Acts of the Apostles*, that, in a very few days after the ascension of Jesus into heaven, the Spirit of God was, in pursuance of his promise, poured out upon his disciples in an abundant manner, attended with the visible appearance of a lambent celestial flame. In consequence of this amazing unction, the poor fishermen of *Galilee*,
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and their companions, were in a moment enabled to speak with the greatest readiness and propriety a variety of languages, the first rudiments of which they had never learned.

The multitudes present were all amazed, and marvelled, saying one to another, "Behold, are not all these which speak *Galileans*? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? *Parthians*, and *Medes*, and *Elamites*, and the dwellers in *Mesopotamia*, and in *Judea*, and *Cappadocia*, in *Pontus* and *Asia*, *Phrygia* and *Pamphylia*, in *Egypt*, and in the parts of *Libya* about *Cyrene*, and strangers of *Rome*, *Jews* and proselytes, *Cretes* and *Arabians*; we do hear them speak, in our own tongues, the wonderful works of God." This was necessary to fit them, according to their commission, to preach the gospel to every creature.

The gift of tongues, though a very extraordinary qualification, was far from being the only one which the apostles received on that memorable day. They were every way amply furnished for the great work before them, and at all times afterwards divinely assisted in it. The risen Redeemer had said to them, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in *Jerusalem*, and in *Judea*, and in *Samarina*, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth."

When they were brought before rulers and kings, it was given to them, without premeditation, what they should say, and what they should speak. When they addressed the multitudes who came to hear them, they spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance. They had power, in the name of Jesus,
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to perform all kinds of miracles *, equal to those of their Master, and, as he had told them, in some circumstances, superior to them. Nor should we here forget that extraordinary power, of communicating to others the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, by the imposition of their hands.

It is reasonable to suppose, that these messengers should be successful in their labours. And so they were. The very first sermon which was preached, after the descent of the Holy Ghost, converted three thousand of those who, by wicked hands, had crucified and slain the Prince of life. At another time, we read of five thousand; and again of multitudes, both of men and women. Many of the priests were obedient to the faith. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

When the apostles delivered their testimony to the *Gentiles*, the word of the Lord ran, and was glorified. The heathen writers complained, that their idols were neglected, that their temples were deserted, and that no man would buy the sacrifices. All this success attended the plain discourses of a few mean, unlearned fishermen; the Lord working with them, their testimony bore down the pride and the prejudices of the *Jews*, and prevailed over all

* The apostles, when they began to preach the gospel, declared that Jesus was the Christ, the Saviour of the world; that he had done many mighty works; that he was risen from the dead, and had sent them to preach remission of sins in his name among all nations, and to confirm the truth of what they delivered, by signs and wonders and mighty deeds.

By declaring this, they were under the necessity of working miracles, or of losing credit among men. If they wrought no miracles, they confuted themselves.

all the learning of *Greece* and *Rome*. So that, in a short space of time, they brought a great part of the world into subjection to the cross of Christ. But the excellency of the power was of God, and not of men.

It must be allowed, that it is no absolute proof of the favour and approbation of God, for any cause to become popular, and to be encouraged by a multitude of adherents. This, simply considered, is not a determinate evidence of the truth of any religious system, as is plain from the case of *Mahomet* and his deluded followers. *

But in particular situations, and under peculiar circumstances, such as those already mentioned, the argument drawn from success appears to me to have great weight. I mean in situations, where no human strength, art or genius could of itself have prevailed; under circumstances, where imposture could never have supported itself, amidst the dangers and the obstacles which visibly stood in its way.

With respect to the apostles of Christ, every thing around them wore an appearance dangerous to their persons, and hostile to the cause in which they were embarked. In the execution of their office they had to contend with the jealousy of power, and the opposition of authority. The deep-rooted prejudices, the favourite superstitions, and the darling vices of a corrupt world, united all their

* It has been said, that if we, at the present period, divide the known regions of the world into thirty equal parts, the christians will be found to be in possession of five, the Mahometans of six, and the idolaters of nineteen.

their force to impede their progress. But every mountain became a plain before them; because the work was of God, and no power of man could withstand it. The Spirit of the Most High inspired their hearts with a confidence of success, and his almighty arm gave them that success.

We may also justly suppose, that the tidings which these messengers published, and the religion which they established, should have great power over the hearts and lives of those who sincerely embraced them. This is evident beyond all contradiction. The gospel, as it was first preached by the apostles of Christ, turned men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. It was the power of God to the salvation of every one who believed, to the *Jew* first, and also to the *Gentile*. The apostolic weapons of warfare were mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

The converts to christianity became new creatures; old things with them passed away, and all things became new. Men of the most infamous character were washed and sanctified by the blood of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. They put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new. They cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light. Their hearts were detached from the world, and set on things above. They sold their possessions, * and distributed to every

* ' This excess of generosity, which cast private property into the public stock, was so far from being re-

every man as his necessities required. They were inflamed with love to God, to his Son Jesus Christ, and to one another. The multitude of the disciples were of one heart and of one soul. Their heathen neighbours were constrained to say, 'See how these christians love one another.' Religion was their main business, and the solemn acts of devotion their delight. They continued in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in breaking bread and in prayers. Those who believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Those who had used curious arts of magic and deception, brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.* So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed. It wrought effectually in them that believed. Their works of faith, their labours of love, and their patience of hope were manifest unto all men.

Now, compare with this any of those religious systems which men have devised, and you will in one moment perceive the amazing difference. That system of religion must be of God which effectually recovers lost sinners to himself, and reinstitutes his blessed image on their souls. And let it be remembered,

required by the apostles, or imposed as a law of christianity, that *Peter* reminds *Ananias*, that he had been guilty, in his behaviour, of an officious and voluntary prevarication. For whilst, says he, thy estate remained unsold, "was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?"

Paley's View of the Evidences, &c. Vol. I. Page 71.

* About six thousand pounds sterling.

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bered, that so far as the gospel still prevails, it is known to produce, in a measure, the very same effects as at the beginning. O that its power might be experienced, and its fruits brought forth, as in ancient days! This would best put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. *

It is reasonable to suppose, that a religion, of which God is the Author, should secure due honour to all his attributes and perfections. If the gospel system does not do this, and that more effectually than any other religious system that ever was

* Archdeacon PALEY justly observes, 'After men became christians, much of their time was spent in prayer and devotion, in religious meetings, in celebrating the eucharist, in conferences, in exhortations, in preaching, in an affectionate intercourse with one another, and correspondence with other societies. Perhaps their mode of life, in its form and habit, was not very unlike that of the Unitas Fratrum, or that of modern Methodists.'—*View of the Evidence of Christianity*, Vol. I. Page 38.

He adds, 'We know what the precepts of the religion are; how pure, how benevolent, how disinterested a conduct they enjoin; and that this purity and benevolence are extended to the very thoughts and affections. Men are brought to any thing almost sooner than to change their habit of life, especially when the change is either inconvenient, or made against the force of natural inclination, or with the loss of accustomed indulgences. It is the most difficult of all things to convert men from vicious habits to virtuous ones, as every one may judge from what he feels in himself, as well as from what he sees in others. It is almost like making men over again.' Yet this was done by that gospel which, as has been remarked, is the power of God to salvation, to every one that believeth.

was proposed to the attention of mankind, I am, for my own part, willing to give it up. If the reader will allow me to express my own feelings on this head, I must beg leave to say, that no system, which is not honourable to God, at the same time that it affords suitable relief to man, in his lapsed and miserable state, will afford me any rational satisfaction. But from the closest examination of the christian scheme, for more than forty years, I do sincerely declare, that I think it, on every account, most worthy of all acceptance; and nothing endears it more to my own heart than this one consideration, that it secures the highest honour to all the perfections of Him who is its Author.

We see, in the sacred scheme of christianity, that a just and holy God, though determined to display his mercy and unbounded grace, would do it only in such a way as might eternally vindicate the honour of his law, demonstrate the purity of his nature, and set forth the inviolable faithfulness of his threatening word.

We conceive that the Most High is infinitely wise; and we see his wisdom shine through all his works. But no where have we so striking a display of it as in the œconomy of our salvation. How wonderful was the contrivance which could harmonize in this vast design, the seemingly opposite claims of mercy and of justice! Which could satisfy, which could exalt, and magnify both; causing mercy and truth to meet together, righteousness and peace to embrace each other! Had punishment been inflicted on the sinner in all its severity, the glory of mercy had been obscured. And, on the other hand, had the sinner been pardoned without any penalty sustained by himself or his substitute,

justice had been set aside, and, speaking after the manner of men, one essential attribute of Deity would have triumphed over another. It is well observed by a celebrated poet, that

A God all mercy is a God unjust.

But in the christian scheme, mercy and justice are equally glorified. He who is its Author, and whose understanding is infinite, hath, in the plan of our salvation by the death of his Son, abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence.

The apostle *Paul* tells us, that God set forth his Son for a propitiation, through faith in his blood, with this express design, that he might declare his righteousness; might demonstrate that vindictive justice, the essential character and principal office of which is to punish sin. Thus a holy God shews himself to be strictly and inviolably righteous, in the administration of his government, even while he is the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

In this method of dispensing grace, he secures the utmost reverence to his divine law, he declares his infinite abhorrence of sin, he strikes the deepest terror on every persevering sinner, at the same time that he lays a solid foundation for the highest hope, in every penitent transgressor. The punishment inflicted on condemned souls in the internal regions is not so awful a monument of the justice and holiness of God, as he hath given in the crucifixion of his beloved Son. For if the Lord spared not him, when no sin was found in him, but only imputed to him, how much less will he spare the stubborn offender himself, who obstinately persists in his rebellion? Nothing so strikingly sets forth the horrid

nature of sin, its execrable vileness and loathsomeness in the sight of God; nothing speaks such terror to those who continue to trample on the just and holy laws of their Maker, did they but lay it to heart, as the shameful, the bitter, the accursed death of the Prince of life, for our offences.

The love, the grace and mercy of God are most illustriously displayed in the christian system. Pardon, life, and endless felicity granted to condemned criminals on any terms, must set forth the riches of divine mercy. But when the Father grants these through the wounds, the agonies, the death of his dear, his only begotten, his equal Son, he not only manifests his love, but, as the apostle speaks, commends it. He shews it in such a way as may justly inflame us with gratitude, and transport our souls with everlasting admiration. He displays it in its highest perfection and glory.

The blessings of salvation, invaluable in themselves, are unspeakably enhanced by the manner in which they are conferred. God so loved the world, loved it in such a way, and to such a degree, as can only be expressed, only conceived by himself; he so loved it, that he gave his only begotten Son to torments and death, even the death of the cross, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. Sin hath reigned unto death; but God's free and unbounded grace, in all her fulness, riches and splendour, reigns, like a glorious and superior sovereign, through righteousness to eternal life. A thousand worlds conferred on us would have been as nothing, in comparison with the grace which is displayed in the death of the Son of God for us. While I contemplate the divine character as exhibited in the

christian system, I know not how to express my sentiments better than in the words of the poet,

Should all the forms that men devise
Assault my faith with treach'rous art,
I'd call them vanity and lies,
And bind the gospel to my heart.

It is reasonable to suppose, that if the gospel is from God, it must contain all that relief for man which his helpless and ruined circumstances require. There was no ray of light in the whole system of heathen philosophy and morality, to direct the guilty how their sins might be pardoned. Nothing that could give solid peace to a wounded conscience. But the reconciliation of sinners to God, by the death of his Son in their room and stead, is the distinguishing peculiarity and glory of the evangelical system. It is this, in general, which makes it so suitable to our case, as guilty and perishing sinners.

A very respectable writer * uses, on this subject, the following remarkable expressions. 'We find so much use of Christ, if I may so speak, that he appears as the *soul* which animates the whole body of our divinity; as the centre of the system, diffusing light and life to every part of it. Take away Christ, yea, take away the Deity and atonement of Christ, and the whole ceremonial of the Old Testament appears to us, little more than a dead mass of uninteresting matter; prophecy loses almost all that is valuable and endearing; the gospel is annihilated, or ceases to be that *good news* to lost sinners, which it professes to be; practical religion is divested of

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* Fuller.

its most powerful motives; the evangelical dispensation of its peculiar glory, and heaven itself of its most transporting joys.'

Is any one convinced of guilt, as provoking Heaven, and ruining the soul? Let him ask reason to point out a method of reconciliation, and a refuge of safety. Reason is at a loss, she hesitates as she replies, 'The Deity may perhaps accept our supplications, and grant forgiveness.' But the gospel leaves us not to the sad uncertainty of conjecture. It speaks the language of clear assurance. It informs us that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. That Christ was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. That his blood cleanseth from all sin. That whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

Is the poor sinner's conscience disquieted? The gospel remedy alone can give him substantial peace. Nothing can afford true peace to an enlightened conscience, but that which removes sin, saves from destruction, satisfies the demands of justice, and gives due honour to God and his holy law. The trembling conscience finds all these important ends completely answered by the obedience and the sacrifice of the Son of God. Here then it meets with substantial relief for all its disquietudes, that which furnishes a solid ground whereon to rest, and which will fill it with the peace of God that passeth all understanding.

Is the sinner conscious of the imperfection of all his own obedience, and sensible that he cannot stand before his Maker, or find acceptance with him, in any righteousness which is not answerable
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to the full demands of the law? He finds in the gospel the gift of righteousness revealed, even that righteousness of God which is by the faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe.

Is the sinner deeply convinced of his own impotence and insufficiency in respect to the repelling of temptation, performing the duties incumbent upon him, and bringing forth fruit to God? The gospel furnishes him with ample relief. "It hath pleased the Father that in Christ all fulness should dwell, and from his fulness we receive grace for grace. It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Sin shall not have dominion over you. Ye are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. My grace is sufficient for you, my strength is made perfect through weakness."

In short, let the sinner's wants be ever so many, his enemies ever so numerous, or his dangers ever so great, the gospel system provides for all. It is exactly suited to his circumstances, and adapted to his necessities. It is a sovereign balm for every wound, a cordial for every fear, a plaster for every sore, a medicine for every malady. Surely then, it is contrived, prepared, and furnished by a Divine Hand.* It

* True religion, in order to accomplish the happiness of man, ought to be suitable to his fallen state. It ought to convince us, not only that there is a God, that we are under every kind of obligation to love him with all our hearts, and that our true felicity consists in being devoted to him; but it ought to inform us, that we are full of gross darkness, which hinders us from knowing and loving him. It ought to discover to us the cause of that enmity and opposition which

It is reasonable to suppose, that if the christian religion is really of divine origin, it must afford support and consolation under all the afflictions and calamities of life. When a man is visited with sickness, or oppressed by calamity, let him look into the systems of the most refined philosophy for relief. *Plato* will tell him, that such dispensations coincide with the general plan of the divine government. *Virgil* will inform him, that afflictive visitations are, more or less, the unavoidable lot of all men. Another moralist will whisper in the ear of the distressed and dejected sufferer, 'Impatience adds to the load; but a calm submission renders it more supportable.' Now, though these observations are just, yet they are spiritless and inefficacious cordials, in comparison with those which the gospel affords.

In this divine system we are informed, that afflictions are fatherly chastisements; that they are tokens of our Redeemer's love, and fruits of his faithful care; that they are intended to make us partakers of his holiness; to produce in us the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and to work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Our compassionate Saviour assures us, that in all our affliction he is afflicted; that he will be with us in trouble; that he will never leave us nor forsake us; that

which we bear to God, and to our own happiness. It ought to set before us that divine Remedy which infinite mercy has provided, and in what way we are to be actually interested in it. Let men compare all the religions in the world, in these respects; and let them try whether any one but the christian is suited to their necessities.' *Monf. Pascal.*

that his Spirit shall be our comforter, his promises our stay, and his everlasting arm our never-failing support. He assures us, that we are only afflicted for our profit, and that all these things shall work together for our good. What sovereign cordials are these amidst the calamities of life!

Supported by these cordials, we find the afflicted children of God enabled to glory in tribulation. "What shall we then say to these things?" says the apostle *Paul*, "if God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? or distress? or persecution? or famine? or nakedness? or peril? or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." Let those who dare to reject this divine remedy consider what they are doing. They give up that which only can smoothe the rugged path of life, and afford consolation amidst the sorrows and calamities of the present state.

It is reasonable to suppose that such a system of religion, as that in question, must furnish out substantial support in a dying hour, and open to the minds of real believers, certain prospects of future felicity. And this is most certainly the case. The religion of Jesus dispenses her choicest cordials when they are most needed; in the seasons of exigence, in poverty, in exile, in sickness, and in our last conflict with that most formidable enemy, the king of terrors. The essential superiority which is derived from it is less felt, at least, it is less apparent, when the christian is in full possession of riches, and splendour, and rank, and the various other gifts of Providence. But when all these are swept away by the rude hand of time, or the rough

rough blasts of adversity, the faithful follower of Jesus stands, like the steady oak, the glory of the forest, erect and vigorous; stripped indeed of his summer foliage, but more than ever discovering to the observing eye, his solid strength; being rooted and grounded in Christ, as a tree of righteousness of the Lord's own planting, that he may be glorified.

Death, the last enemy of man; and the gloomy grave, the terror of all living, are overcome by the Captain of our salvation. The true christian must feel the stroke of mortality, as well as other men; but to him the sting of death is no more. His guilt being expiated by the atonement of the Redeemer, death is disarmed. The pardoned sinner, relying on the all-sufficient Saviour, is enabled to say,—
“ Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. My heart and my flesh fail, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

Is not that religion of divine origin by which the king of terrors is transformed into a messenger of peace, which makes it gain to die, which ensures a glorious resurrection at the last day, and which opens the most enlivening and consolatory prospects of unbounded and everlasting felicity in heaven? Let those who would persuade us to relinquish this system produce any thing that will bear the least degree of comparison with it. Let them point out something sufficient to countervail the loss of that
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which is our only solace under the calamities of life, our sovereign support in the awful hour of dissolution, and the foundation of a sure and certain hope of future happiness.

It is reasonable to suppose, that a religion of this description should have the stamp of holiness and purity through its whole contexture. And the christian system does not disappoint us in this. Its purity is a decisive evidence of the origin whence it proceeded. It is an evidence every where legible and visible. On the strictest examination, the inquirer must be convinced, from every view of it, that it is worthy of its Author, who is glorious in holiness, and of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. Its laws are holy, just and good, requiring truth in the inward part, and the strictest integrity of principle, of intention, of thought and of action. Its doctrines are doctrines according to godliness, teaching us, most powerfully and influentially, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.

If we contemplate the gospel by itself, and view it in its own light, we shall have every reason to admire it, both for the purity of its nature, and the tendency which it has to promote the holiness and the happiness of mankind. It bears on it the stamp of a divine original; the image and superscription of him from whom it comes. * There is a spirit which

* The disciples of the Lord were examples of fervent zeal for the welfare of mankind; they were of an inoffensive behaviour, of disinterestedness and self-denial, of unwearied industry, of the most extensive cha-

which animates and beautifies it throughout, which must strongly prepossess the pious mind in its favour. There is no vice, even within the darkest retreats of the mind, which the word of God does not detect. There is no duty, connected with the glory of the divine Being, the welfare of our neighbour, or the true happiness of ourselves, but what this sacred book enjoins, and enforces with the strongest motives and inducements imaginable. "Thy word," says the man after God's own heart, "thy word is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it."

Lastly, it seems highly reasonable to suppose, that if the gospel be of God, he would appoint it to be transmitted to posterity in writing. The Son of God had a commission from his Father's throne, for the benefit of all nations, and of all ages. Undoubtedly, care must have been taken, to have some authentic records of the doctrine which he taught, of the wonderful transactions of his life, and the circumstances of his death and resurrection. It is reasonable to suppose, that he would qualify and ordain some of his followers, to deliver down to posterity, in the most accurate manner, the whole system of that religion of which he is both the Author, and the sum and substance.

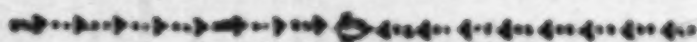
Because it is very apparent that the great end of this vast and astonishing *apparatus*, if that expression may be allowed, must, in the nature of things, have been frustrated, if no such records had
been

charity, of patience, of courage, of constancy, and, in short, of a regular practice of what they taught and recommended to others. The first christians resembled their teachers in these good qualities.

been provided. For it is morally impossible that unwritten tradition should convey a system of religion pure and uncorrupted, even to the next generation; and much more, that it should so convey it to the end of time.

And it should seem, so far as we can judge, by no means worthy the divine wisdom, to suffer the good effects of so great and noble a plan to be lost, for want of so easy an expedient.

Having proceeded thus far, I shall now beg leave to take a short survey of the sacred writings in general, and of their scope, tendency and design; after which I shall call the reader's attention to the New Testament in particular, and touch on the characters and qualifications of the principal writers of it, with a view to establish the important point under consideration, *The truth of the christian religion.*



CHAP. II.

The Evidence arising from the Credibility of what is contained in the Scriptures, and from the Characters and Qualifications of some of the Writers of them.

IN a revelation of the Divine will concerning us, we might expect to find those truths which it is most necessary for us to know, in order to our serving our Maker acceptably in this world, and our being prepared for a state of happiness in another. As he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of those that diligently seek

seek him, we might expect to find in a revelation which professedly comes from him, a clear account of his own existence, of the unity of his divine essence, and of the perfections and attributes of his nature. We might expect here to be informed of the necessary and immutable difference between good and evil; the rewards and punishments of a future state; and the absolute necessity of attending with seriousness and ardour, to the great concerns of our souls, and of the eternal world. And the bible will not disappoint us in any of these particulars.

We might expect, in such a revelation, the line and path of our duty to be clearly marked out; and that every vice would be exposed, and every virtue enjoined. We might reasonably suppose, its general tendency would be, to instruct us in those things which are most necessary to be known and understood by us. These are not subjects of amusement, or curiosity: not the origin of arts, or the depths of science; not the histories of mighty empires, desolating the globe by their bloody contentions; * not the subtilties of logic; the mysteries

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of

* 'With respect to *politics*, in the usual sense of that word, or discussions concerning different forms of government, christianity declines every question upon the subject. Whilst politicians are disputing about monarchies, aristocracies, and republics, the gospel is alike applicable, useful, and friendly to them all; insomuch as,

1. It tends to make men virtuous; as it is easier to govern good men than bad men under any constitution.

2. It states obedience to government in ordinary cases, to be not merely a submission to force, but a duty of conscience.

3. It

of metaphysics; the sublimities of poetry, or the niceties of criticism. These are not subjects necessary to be known in order to final happiness. They doubtless have their use, and may properly enough occupy the learned leisure of a few individuals of mankind. But the divine word sets before us matters infinitely more important, and of more general concern. It is a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths.

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. Moreover by them is thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward.” Such is the Psalmist’s commendation of the five books of *Moses*, and of those few other divine records then extant. How justly may we apply it to the bible in its present entire and perfect state!

‘When I consider,’ says a pious and elegant writer, the contents of the scriptures, and believe myself interested in the promises they make, and the privileges they confer, I am induced to cry out

3. It induces dispositions favourable to public tranquillity; a christian’s chief care being to pass quietly through this world to a better.

4. It prays for communities, and for the governors of communities, of whatever description or denomination they be, with a solicitude and fervency proportioned to the influence which they possess upon human happiness. All which, in my opinion, is just as it should be.’

Paley’s View of the Evidences, &c. Vol. II. p. 70.

out,——What are all the other books in the world, compared with these invaluable volumes! No more than an entertaining novel, or a few prudential rules for domestic œconomy, compared with a parent's will, a royal charter, or an imperial grant of titles and manors! When I consider the language of the scriptures, and sometimes experience their energy on my soul, I am inclined to say,—‘Other writings, though polished with the nicest touches of art, only tinkle on the ear, or affect us like the shepherd's reed. But these, even amidst all their noble negligence, strike, alarm, transport us, somewhat like the voice of thunder, or the archangel's trumpet.

Inestimable book! It heals the maladies of life, and subdues the fear of death. It strikes a light-some vista through the gloom of the grave, and opens a charming, a glorious prospect of immortality in the heavens.’

No other book gives us such views of God, and of man, of the present, and of a future life, or of the relations which all these bear to each other. It gives us a just portrait of the vanity of this world, and of all its pursuits, and exhibits distinct, lively and exquisite representations of the joys of another; of the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and the triumphs of the righteous in that day, when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality.

No other book has ever pretended to give any account of the depravity of man, or to point out any suitable remedy for it. No other has ventured to declare the unpardonable nature of sin without the influence of a mediatorial interposition, and

the vicarious atonement of a divine Redeemer.*

The peculiar doctrines of the gospel were as inconceivable to the wisest of mankind, antecedent to their publication, as the Newtonian system of philosophy is at this day, to the most ignorant tribes of savages in the wilds of *America*. They are doctrines which human reason never could have discovered; but which, when discovered, coincide with it, and are confirmed by it; and which, though beyond the reach of all the learning and penetration of *Plato*, *Aristotle*, and *Cicero*, are now clearly laid open to the eye of every peasant and mechanic with the bible in his hand.

In this divine book we find the power of religion exemplified in the lives of good and holy men. And perhaps no species of writing has been rendered more beneficial, or more promoted the cause of vital godliness. Being compassed about with a cloud of witnesses, who have experienced the efficacy of saving grace, realized the supports and consolations of religion, and been enabled to practise the duties of it with steadiness, constancy and perseverance, amidst a thousand difficulties; we, in our turn, are encouraged to lay aside every weight, and the sin which easily besets us, and to run with patience the race set before us.

There

* ‘That Christ suffered and died as an atonement for the sins of men, is a doctrine so constantly and so strongly enforced through every part of the New Testament, that whoever will seriously peruse those writings, and deny that it is there, may, with as much reason and truth, after reading the works of *Thucydides* and *Livy*, assert, that in them no mention is made of any facts relative to the histories of *Greece* and *Rome*.’ *Jenyns*.

There is nothing in the characters exhibited in this sacred volume which would lead any one to suspect that they are feigned. They have all the internal marks imaginable of being real.

The history in general, contained in this book, has every evidence of its being a real history. Many profane historians, writing of the same times, confirm the truth of the events which are either incidentally or more purposely related in it. The Old Testament contains a chronological account of the beginning of the world, and an unbroken genealogy of mankind for many ages before common history begins; and carried forward so as to make up a continued thread of history for the space of almost four thousand years.

It contains an account of God's entering into covenant with a particular nation, that they should be his people, and he their God, in a peculiar sense. It informs us of his often interposing in their affairs in a miraculous way; of his giving them the promise of a particular country, and long after, the possession of it; of his assuring them of the greatest national prosperity in it, if they would worship him, and obey his commands, renouncing all the idols which the heathen nations acknowledged, and abstaining from their sinful customs and practices. It contains threatenings denounced against them, if they disobeyed their rightful sovereign, and fell into the idolatry which almost universally prevailed in the world.

This book gives us a general account of the condition of religion and its professors, in that state of apostacy from God, in which it every where supposes the world to lie. And this account of the state of religion carries along with it some brief

hints

hints of the political state of things, so far as religion is affected by it.

Revelation indeed represents the common affairs of this world, and what is going on in it, as a mere scene of distraction. It contains some very general account of the great empires which were to rise, flourish, and decline, in successive periods, till the God of heaven should set up a kingdom never to be destroyed.

The writers of the sacred books, though they lived and wrote in different ages, and at distant periods of time, yet all harmoniously agree in the relation of facts, and in the establishment of every important point of doctrine. If we find, in any instance, a trifling difference of expression, or an omission of circumstances by one writer which are recorded by another, we are hence the more fully convinced that there was no combination among those writers, to impose upon mankind. That apparent disagreement in circumstantial matters, on which some found their objections against the christian scheme, is, in fact, an argument of considerable weight in favour of the truth of it. The sacred writers all inculcate and express the same points of faith; they all deliver the same injunctions and commands; they all, for substance, relate the same things, however they may differ as to certain modes of expression, which admit of a very easy reconciliation.

The similarity of certain transactions which took place at different times, the ambiguity of names, and many other circumstances, may occasion some little difficulty of interpretation, yet do by no means weaken the credibility of the sacred writers; but, on the other hand, serve to vindicate
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and free them from all suspicion of falsehood. Since it is usual with those who would impose upon mankind, to relate all circumstances by compact and agreement, so that there may not appear any colour or shew of difference.

The New Testament abounds with internal proofs of the truth of its contents. A spirit of piety, charity and disinterestedness appears through the whole of it. The Evangelists ingenuously relate the misbehaviour of the apostles on some occasions. They have sometimes recorded what the smallest degree of craft and dissimulation would have taught them to suppress. A statuary works upon marble, an historian upon facts; both cut them to their fancy, and pare off all that will not serve for their purpose. But the writers of the New Testament stand remarkably clear of this imputation. * They enter into a large and accurate detail of places, times, persons and events very circumstantially, in which, if they had mixed fraud and falsehood, they might have been easily detected. †

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* Nothing can destroy the evidence of testimony in any case, but a proof or probability that the persons are not competent judges of the facts to which they give testimony; or that they are actually under some indirect influence in giving it.

† ' It doth not appear that it ever came into the minds of these writers, to consider how this or the other action would appear to mankind, or what objections might be raised thereupon. But, without at all attending to this, they lay the facts before you, at no pains to think whether they will appear credible or not. If the reader will not believe their testimony, there is no help for it; they tell the truth and attend to nothing else. Surely this looks like
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In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word is established. Divine Providence has favoured us with four, in respect to the life, the actions, the sufferings, and the death of Jesus Christ. We have also a history, taking up the narrative from his death, and carrying on an account of the propagation of his religion, and of some of the most eminent instruments engaged in that work, for about thirty years. We have, likewise, as the learned PALEY observes, what some may think still more original, a collection of letters, written upon the subject of christianity, by certain principal agents in the business, and in the midst of their concern and connection with it. And we have these writings severally attesting the subject in question, particularizing the sufferings of the witnesses of the facts recorded in the gospel history, and attesting these facts in every variety of form in which they can be represented; directly and indirectly, expressly and incidentally, by assertion, recital and allusion; by narratives of the transactions themselves, and by arguments and discourses built upon them; either occasionally referring to them, or necessarily supposing them.

This variety claims particular notice, because, in examining ancient records, or indeed any species

sincerity, and that they published nothing to the world but what they believed themselves.' *Duchal.*

'There is always some truth where there are considerable particularities related: as in *Thucydides's* history of the *Peloponnesian* war, and *Cæsar's* of the war in *Gaul*. In both these, the particulars of time, place and persons are mentioned. They are therefore universally esteemed true, to a great degree of exactness.' *Hartley*, Vol. II. Page 109.

cies of testimony, it is of the greatest importance to attend to the grounds of argument which are casually and undesignedly disclosed; as this kind of proof is, of all others, the least liable to be corrupted by fraud, or misrepresentation.

The letters of the apostles, though written without the remotest design of transmitting the history of Christ, or of christianity, to future ages, incidentally disclose to us the following circumstances; the descent and family of Jesus according to the flesh; the innocence, the meekness, and the gentleness of his character; his exalted nature; his circumcision; his transfiguration; his life of suffering, and the patience and resignation he manifested through it; the appointment of his holy supper; his agony; his confession before Pilate; his stripes, crucifixion, burial and resurrection; his appearance after it, first to *Cephas*, then to the rest of the apostles; his ascension into heaven, and his appointment to be the future Judge of mankind; the residence of the apostles at *Jerusalem*; the working of miracles by the first preachers of the gospel: the successful propagation of the truth; the persecution of its followers; the miraculous conversion of *Paul*; miracles wrought by him, and alleged in controversies with his adversaries, in letters written to the persons among whom they were wrought *.

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* When these things are calmly considered, we need not be surprized that even a man of *Rousseau's* principles should say, as he does to *Emilius*, 'Shall we suppose the evangelic history to be a mere fiction? Indeed, my friend, it bears not the marks of fiction. On the contrary, the history of *Socrates*, which no body presumes to doubt, is not so well attested as that of Jesus Christ.'

Truth of christianity vindicated, page 128.

He also observes, that miracles were the signs of an apostle. The reader may find all these particulars in the epistle to the *Hebrews*, the first and second epistles to the *Corinthians*, and in other places.

There is a close connection and perfect agreement in the leading doctrines of christianity, with each other. The corruption of human nature, the free and sovereign grace of God in our salvation, the proper Deity of our adorable Redeemer, our reconciliation to God by his atoning sacrifice, the pardon of our sins, and the complete justification of our persons by his blood, together with the sanctification of our natures by the operations of his Holy Spirit, are doctrines in perfect harmony one with another; they are all parts of one whole, united in close dependence and mutual congruity.

There is also an intimate connection between these leading doctrines of christianity, and the practical precepts of it. For the grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.

There is the same agreement and mutual dependence to be observed in those noble virtues and holy tempers which christianity so strongly and repeatedly enjoins, and by our progress in which, we may best judge of our advancement in holiness. Such are the fear and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ, deadness to the world, heavenly-mindedness, self-denial and humility; to which may be added, love, kindness, and meekness towards our fellow-creatures. The wisdom of God is so evident in this whole system, which is the only solid ground

ground of our present and future happiness, that an argument may be thence deduced in proof of its divine origin.

The most celebrated virtues of the ancient heathens were high spirit, intrepid courage, and implacable resentment.

*Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer, **

was the portrait of the most illustrious hero, drawn by one of the first poets of antiquity. To these admired qualities, those of a true christian are an exact contrast; for this religion constantly enjoins meekness, patience, and forgiveness of injuries. "But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." That is, as is elsewhere expressed in plainer terms, "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

We are willing to allow, when we maintain the inspiration of the Old and New Testament, that the hand of a transcriber might chance, in some places, to insert one letter or word for another, as is often now done in printing; and the various readings of the sacred scriptures, as well as of all other ancient books, prove, that this has sometimes been the case. † But does this weaken the authority of the bible?

* Intrepid, fierce, of unforgiving rage.

† Dr. Bentley observes, that the New Testament has suffered less injury by the errors of transcribers than the works of any profane author, of the same size and antiquity; which shews that there never was any writing, in the preservation and purity of which, the world was so interested, or so careful.

bible? By no means. Those various readings are generally of so little importance, that he who can lay any stress upon them in the present case must either be defective in judgment, or in integrity. No material alteration has been suffered to be made in the sacred books; we have them preserved to us by the watchful care of Providence, such as they were when they came from the hands of those whose names they bear.

The translation of the scriptures into our own tongue, if diligently compared with the original, will be found, in the main, to be just, faithful, and judicious. The original copies of the writings of the New Testament, it has been proved by *Grotius* and others, were preserved for two hundred years after Christ. In the following ages, they were translated into the *Syriac*, *Æthiopic*, *Arabic* and *Latin* tongues; these translations are yet extant, and do not differ in any thing of moment from the *Greek* copies themselves. *

That the four Gospels, the history of the Acts of the Apostles, the several Epistles, and the book of the Revelation, have descended to us uncorrupted, is fully manifest, from the citations which have been made from them by christian writers of all ages; from the multitude of copies, and early translations, which left no room to fraud or inattention to do them any important injury; and from the various readings themselves, which, for

* We ask no more for the books composing the New Testament than what we allow to other books. That the Koran is genuine no one denies. That the history of *Apollonius Tyanæus* was written by *Philostratus*, no one doubts. Why should the books of the New Testament be suspected not to be genuine?

for the most part, as has been observed, are of small consequence.

It seems very desirable to have some intelligence of the writers of so important a book as the New Testament. And it hath been the good pleasure of God to favour us with a circumstantial history of several of them; particularly of *John*, of *Peter*, and of *Paul*, whose writings constitute a considerable part of the sacred volume.

With respect to *John*, we know that, besides the concern he had in the cure of the lame man, he was favoured with the visions of God in the isle of *Patmos*, where our Lord, more than half a century after his ascension, did him the honour to use him as his amanuensis, expressly dictating to him the letters he was pleased to send to the seven churches in *Asia*. No doubt the Redeemer would then so preside over his other writings, as to secure him from mistakes in them.

As to *Peter*, we find him striking *Ananias* and *Sapphira* dead with a word; curing, by the like powerful word, one cripple at *Jerusalem*, and another at *Lydda*; and calling back *Dorcas* even from the dead. Let us view him in that great concern, of being marked out so particularly by an angel to *Cornelius*, and sent to him, as the oracle of God himself, from whom that worthy and honourable *Roman* officer was to hear the solemn words, by which he and all his house should be saved.

After this we view him, on a particular occasion, delivered from the hand of *Herod*, and from all the expectation of the people of the *Jews*, by an angel from heaven; who struck off his chains, and opened the doors of his prison, the very night

before he was to have been executed. What more could be necessary to prove the divine inspiration of what he taught, so far as inspiration was necessary to render it completely authentic? And upon what pretence can the authority of his writings be denied, if that of his preaching be granted?

Let *Paul*, that great scribe, instructed in the kingdom of God, and tutored in the regions of *Paradise*, to whose pen we owe so many invaluable epistles, be considered in the same view. Let us impress our minds with the various scenes through which we know he passed, and the distinguishing favours with which his Master honoured him, that we may judge how we are to receive the instructions of his pen. He was miraculously called by the voice of Christ to the profession of his gospel, when he was persecuting the believers of it even to the death. He then received a full and distinct revelation of that glorious gospel, by the immediate inspiration of its divine Author. This is a fact which he expressly and repeatedly records, and in which he could not be mistaken. How bright was the lustre of those astonishing works which he was enabled to shew forth wherever he went, as well as of those wrought in his favour, which manifested him to be the care of the Keeper of *Israel*! Demons ejected; distempers cured, sometimes with a touch, and sometimes without, by a garment sent from him to the patient; his motions guided from place to place by a divine oracle; *Elymas* struck blind for opposing him; his bands loosed by an earthquake; his strength and vigour instantaneously restored, when the rage of the barbarous populace at *Lystra* had stoned him, and left him for dead; and, to add no more, his safety in a shipwreck, with that
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of near three hundred persons in the same vessel for his sake, promised by an angel, and accomplished without the loss of a single person, when they had expected nothing but certain destruction.

The testimony of the apostle *Paul* may be considered as detached from that of the other apostles. He declares, as we have seen, that he received the gospel in general, and the institution of the Lord's supper in particular, not from the rest of the apostles, or in conjunction with them, but from Christ himself; whom he saw after his ascension, as is recorded in the history of the Acts. His first epistle to the *Corinthians*, in which he particularly gives this account of his commission from the Redeemer, is quoted by *Clemens Romanus*, in an epistle of his own to the same church.

Paul likewise testifies, what was publicly known by the people to whom he wrote, that it was the Lord who had endued him with the power of working miracles. "Truly, the signs of an apostle were wrought among you, in all patience, in signs and wonders, and mighty deeds." He also speaks of a great variety of miraculous gifts bestowed on many individuals of those communities to whom he addressed himself. These gifts were then known to subsist among them. He mentions them, as it were, incidentally, in the most easy manner, as any person might speak to another of a fact which was familiarly known to them both.

These considerations seem to me sufficient to carry conviction along with them to every candid mind, of the point in question, in proportion to the degree of attention with which they are regarded.

It may be farther observed, that Jesus Christ had absolutely promised his disciples the special guid-

ance of his Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of truth, to guide them into all truth, to shew them things to come, to teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance whatsoever he had said unto them, and to abide with them for ever; that being thus fitted and empowered, they might bear witness unto him. Accordingly, after his resurrection, when he gave them their full commission, he said, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you; and he breathed upon them, saying, Receive ye the Holy Ghost."

Jesus had before given his disciples this assurance of his aid; "When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak; for it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you. On the same principle we may conclude, that when they were to write for the use of all future generations, it was the Spirit of the Father who dictated to them what they should write; so that they wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

It must farther be observed, that these holy men assume to themselves such authority, and speak of their own discourses and writings in such peculiar terms, as nothing but a consciousness of divine inspiration could warrant. "The things which I write unto you, are the commandments of the Lord. He that despiseth, that is, rejecteth what I write, despiseth not man but God, who hath given us his Holy Spirit."

Though the apostle *John* was remarkable for his modesty and humility of mind, yet he in effect asserts, that he had, in concurrence with his brethren, given such abundant proof of his being under di-

divine guidance in his teaching, whether by word or letter, that his doctrine was the standard by which they might judge of truth or error; and surely this can be nothing short of asserting the fullest inspiration: "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth us not: hereby know we the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error."

I would beg leave to add, that in regard to the facts recorded in the New Testament, it appears to me impossible that they should have been delivered to us in the manner they are, without divine inspiration. Supposing the Evangelists, for instance, to have been eye-witnesses of the events they report, it nevertheless would have been strange to the last degree, if, left to themselves, they should have given us so clear, particular, and consistent a detail of them as they have done. Let any one reflect on the number and the variety of the facts they record, with all the circumstances attending them, the length of many of our Saviour's discourses, the time that elapsed before they were committed to writing, the fallibility of the memory, the different impressions which things usually make on the minds of spectators, and many other unavoidable occasions of inaccuracy and mistake, and surely he must be convinced, that nothing short of inspiration could have enabled these writers to deliver their concurring testimonies in the manner they have done.

The Holy Spirit kept a watch over them as they wrote, guarded them against the illusions of a warm and eccentric imagination, enabled them to state facts truly, to relate the circumstances of them accurately, and to range them in an orderly and consistent manner. To this purpose our Lord speaks, when

when he promises his disciples, as we have before observed, that the Holy Ghost should bring all things to their remembrance.

And here it should be remarked, that this inspiration did by no means preclude the natural and regular use of their own proper memory. The facts reported, of which they had been eye-witnesses, rose to their view in the manner they had beheld them, and struck them, it is probable, with the same sensations they felt at the time they happened.

Nor was it necessary to their being thus inspired, that they should not be at liberty to use their own words, or to write in that style which was natural to them. This I mention, because it is evident that the inspired writers, particularly the Evangelists, differ in their style from each other. And it is also evident, that, in the writings of *John*, there is a manifest sameness of style in his *Gospel*, *Epistles*, and book of *Revelation*. This may be also observed in the writings of *Luke* and *Paul*.

But the objection to the inspiration of the New Testament, grounded on this circumstance, is utterly inconclusive. This will appear, if it be considered, that, in relating historical events, the main business is, the stating of them truly and accurately. To which purpose, it is not necessary that other words be dictated to the writer than he is accustomed to use, or that the natural and usual turn of his periods and phraseology should be over-ruled. It is enough that we are assured, by divine authority, that the facts which the Evangelists relate are in every particular true, and may most surely be depended upon.

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It ought farther to be remarked, that this variety of style, observable in their writings, is so far from being an evidence of their not being inspired, that it hath quite the contrary effect. For it seems to have been wisely so ordered by the Father of lights, that they should use their own words, to render the veracity and agreement of the several writers the more conspicuous. And, after all, whatever difference there may be in their style, even admitting that there is more ease and elegance in one than in another, yet that which each uses is the fittest and best adapted to the purpose which infinite wisdom proposed.

Before I dismiss this head, I would just observe, that the sacred writers denounced the most awful judgments on those who should either pervert their writings, add to them, or detract from them. Those who wrested the apostolic epistles are said to have wrested them, as they did the other scriptures, to their own destruction. How very awful are the words of these holy men of God! "Though we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life!" Nothing short of the most perfect divine inspiration could justify such language as this, or secure those who used it from the charge of bold presumption, and base imposition.

CHAP. III.

The Evidence arising from the concurring Testimonies of Heathen Writers.

WE shall now proceed to observe, that some of the leading facts of the gospel history were taken notice of, and recorded by those heathen authors, who lived in the age of our Saviour and his apostles, or near that period. Though I would avoid every thing that may have the appearance of an ostentatious parade of learning, yet it seems necessary to assert some things on this important subject, which cannot certainly be known without some little acquaintance with ancient writers.

The most considerable *Roman* historians, who lived near the period referred to, are *Tacitus* and *Suetonius*; and to them an appeal is always, and very justly made, as being substantial witnesses on this occasion. *Tacitus* assures us, 'that in *Nero's* days,' who began his reign about twenty years after the death of Christ, 'there was a vast multitude of christians, not only in *Judea*, but at *Rome*; against whom *Nero* raised a persecution, attended with such circumstances of ignominy and cruelty, as moved the compassion even of their enemies.' He intimates also, that this was not the first attempt that was made to crush them.

His contemporary, *Suetonius*, in his concise manner, speaks much to the same purpose. And *Pliny*, the intimate friend and correspondent of both these historians, being employed in *Trajan's* time to persecute

secute the christians, writes an account of them to that emperor, of the vast multitudes he every where found of them, and of the respectability of their moral character.

Some parts of the history of Jesus may be reasonably expected from those who lived at no great distance from *Judea*, the scene of action. *Tacitus*, *Suetonius* and *Dion* record, 'That *Augustus Caesar* ordered the whole empire to be censured or taxed; which procedure, by the over-ruling Providence of God, brought the reputed parents of Jesus to *Bethlehem*, the place where he was to be born. *Chalcidius* relates, 'That a great light, or a new star appeared at that time in the East,' which was the star that directed the wise men to the place where they presented their gifts to the new-born Prince of life.

Macrobius relates it as a known fact, 'That *Herod*, the king of *Palestine*, so often mentioned in the *Roman* history, made a great slaughter of innocent children,' being so jealous of a successor, that he put to death his own sons on that account. This character of him is given by several historians. That the infant Saviour was carried into *Egypt*, is acknowledged by *Celsus*.

Tacitus records, 'That *Pontius Pilate* was governor of *Judea*; that Jesus was brought into judgment before him, and by him condemned and crucified.'

Julian the apostate, *Porphyry*, and *Hierocles*, all of them, not only pagans, but professed enemies and persecutors of christianity, do yet confess, 'that many miraculous cures and works, out of the ordinary course of nature, were wrought by Christ.'

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Phlegon, in his annals, confessed, 'That Jesus foretold several things, which came to pass according to his predictions.'

Trallian, who was the freedman of *Adrian* the emperor, records, 'that at the time when Jesus died, there was a miraculous darkness, and a great earthquake.' Probably some of his heathen friends and correspondents had been witnesses to the darkness, and felt the concussion of the earth.

Pliny the younger, mentioned above, about seventy years after the death of Christ, gives us such particulars relating to the christian religion, within the compass of his own knowledge of the subject, as agree with the accounts we have in the scriptures, of the first state of christianity, after the crucifixion of Christ. The passage, to which I refer, is to the following purport, 'That Christ was worshipped among the christians as God; that they would rather suffer death than blaspheme him; that they received a sacrament, and by it entered into a vow of abstaining from sin and wickedness; that they had private assemblies of worship, and used to join together in singing hymns to Christ as God.' How thankful ought we to be for this pleasing testimony, given by this ancient and respectable heathen writer!

Julian, the blaspheming apostate, acknowledges, 'That *Peter*, the apostle of Christ, performed many wonderful works.'

Porphiry, who objects to christianity, that since Jesus had begun to be worshipped, *Esculapius* and the rest of the gods, did no more hold intercourse with men, yet acknowledges, That the devils, or evil spirits, were subject to the christians.

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Thus we see what a multitude of Pagan testimonies may be produced for all these remarkable facts, relating to the christian religion. It cannot be expected that they should mention particulars which were transacted among the disciples only; such as the transfiguration, the agony in the garden, the appearance of Christ after the resurrection, and others of the like nature. It was impossible for a heathen author to relate these things, because, if he had sincerely believed them, he would have been a heathen no longer; and, on that account, his testimony would not have been thought of so much validity. The desolations of war, and the depredations of time have doubtless destroyed many other testimonies which once existed, but we have reason to be thankful that Providence has preserved so many as have been now cited, together with others which I forbear to introduce, lest I should tire the reader's patience.

The christian religion has not been denied the testimony of enemies; a testimony of which it did not stand in need; but which, being extorted by the irresistible force of truth, may well be esteemed as a confirmation of its general evidence; since they whose wish and whose interest it was to decry it, were yet compelled to acknowledge it in part. Thus, like *Pilate*, they pronounced him righteous whom they condemned; and, like *Judas*, they confessed him innocent whom they betrayed.

The brief and incidental relations and notices of what relates to the affairs of christianity, which are found in the writings of pagans, so far as they go, are of great weight. They bear testimony of these facts; that *Jesus of Nazareth* was the author of this religion; that he was put to death at *Jerusalem*,
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by the authority of the *Roman* governor, *Pilate*; that notwithstanding this, the cause prevailed in that city, and throughout *Judea*, and that it was thence propagated to distant countries; that the converts were very numerous; that they suffered great hardships and injuries for their profession; and that all this took place in the age of the world which our sacred books have assigned.

They proceed further, to describe the manners of christians, in terms perfectly conformable to the accounts extant in the New Testament; that they constantly assembled together on a certain day; that they sung hymns to Christ as God; that they bound themselves in a solemn manner, not to commit any crime, but to adhere strictly to their promises; that they worshipped him who was crucified in *Judea*; that this their first Law-giver had taught them to look upon themselves and one another as brethren; that they had a great contempt for the things of the world; that with great readiness they flew to one another's relief; that they lived in the hope of immortality; that they despised death, and willingly surrendered themselves to sufferings. I know not what we could have desired more, in point of testimony, from those who were professed enemies. Let it be remembered, that these accounts are given by persons who viewed the subject at a distance; who understood not the true nature of christianity, and who were uninterested about it. Yet there is no contradiction, in what they say, of the sacred history; no different story set up against it; but a circumstantial coincidence with what the inspired writers have recorded.

CHAP. IV.

The Evidence arising from the Prevalence of the Cause, amidst great Opposition, though promoted by Means which in themselves might appear inadequate.

IT was foretold that the kingdom of the Redeemer should be established on and after his appearance in the world, that it should be extended far and wide, that it should, in a short space of time, have a large and ample increase, and that it should continue for ever. For though the *Jews* would reject it, it should be embraced by multitudes among the *Gentile* nations. “In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed;—and it shall stand for ever. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of *Jacob*, and to restore the preserved of *Israel*: I will also give thee for a light to the *Gentiles*, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.”

The religion of Jesus presented itself to mankind with an aspect the most chaste and severe. Far from condescending to flatter their appetites and passions, it strictly enjoined its followers the unpleasing exercise of constant self-denial, of pluck-

ing out even the eye, and cutting off the hand, that gave occasion of offence. Far from seeking to recommend itself to popular favour, by complying and accommodating tenets; it directly and openly opposed almost every opinion, and every prejudice of those to whom it was proposed.

It was not enjoined on the subject nations by the commands of sovereign princes and rulers; nor was it, for the space of full three hundred years, even indirectly countenanced by any influence of government and authority. On the contrary, we behold, with astonishment, the pomp of adverse power, no less than the pride of learning, and the arrogance of philosophy, resisting its influence, by a long and persevering persecution, but yielding at length to the power of those weapons of warfare which are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.

In a few years after the establishment of christianity, as we find from the epistles written to the several churches, there were large congregations of christians at *Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Colosse, Thessalonica, Philippi, Laodicea, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia*, in the island of *Crete*, in *Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia*, and *Bithynia*, as well as in many other places. * Our Lord

* 'The propagation of this religion was not less extraordinary than the religion itself, or less above the reach of all human power, than the discovery of it was above that of all human understanding. It is well known, that, in a short space of time, it was spread over all the principal parts of *Asia* and *Europe*; and this by the ministry of only an inconsiderable number of the most inconsiderable persons. At this time

Lord Jesus Christ so wrought by the apostle *Paul*, as to make the *Gentiles* obedient both in word and deed; so that from *Jerusalem* even round about unto *Illyricum*, he had fully preached the gospel of Christ. The rest of the inspired witnesses had considerable success in other parts of the world, as *Eusebius* and other historians inform us. So that with good reason the apostle *Paul* applies to them and their doctrine, what is originally spoken of the luminaries of heaven, "Their line is gone out into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."

I shall here beg leave to make some extracts from a late eminent and respectable author on this subject.

As the apostles themselves were honoured with very remarkable success, this divine seed was propagated so fast in the next age, that *Pliny* testifies, 'he found the heathen temples in *Achaia* almost deserted;' and *Tertullian* afterwards declares, 'that all places but those temples were filled with christians; so that were they only to withdraw, cities and provinces would be depopulated.'

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Nor

time paganism was in the highest repute, believed universally by the vulgar, and patronised by the great. The wisest men of the wisest nations assisted at its sacrifices, and consulted its oracles on the most important occasions. Whether these were tricks of the priests or of the Devil, is of no consequence, as they were both equally unlikely to be overcome; the fact is certain, that, on the preaching of the apostles, their altars were deserted, and their deities were dumb. This is surely sufficient to prove the authority of their commission; and to convince us, that neither their undertaking nor their execution of it could possibly be their own.' *Jenyns*.

Nor did the gospel triumph thus only within the boundaries of the *Roman* empire; for long before *Tertullian* was born, *Justin Martyr*, in his dialogue with *Trypho* the *Jew*, written somewhat more than an hundred years after the death of *Christ*, declares, 'that there was no nation of men, whether *Greeks* or barbarians, not excepting those savage nations who wandered in clans from one region to another, and had no fixed habitation, who had not learnt to offer prayers and thanksgivings to the Father and Maker of all, in the name of *Jesus* who was crucified.' *

How can we account for all this, but by saying that the hand of the Lord was with the first preachers of the gospel, and therefore such multitudes believed, and turned to the Lord? How had it been possible, that so small a fountain should presently have swelled into a mighty river, and even have covered the face of the earth, had it not sprung from the sanctuary of God, and been rendered thus triumphant under his almighty arm?

Had this new religion, so directly contrary to all the prejudices of education, been contrived to soothe

* The learned and ingenious historian, *Mr. Gibbon*, has strangely enough put his invention to the rack, in order to discover secondary causes for the wonderful progress of christianity. Of these he has enumerated five, of a very peculiar kind. Yet he felt himself obliged to acknowledge, that 'the christian faith obtained so remarkable a victory over the established religions of the earth, by the convincing evidence of the doctrine itself, and the ruling providence of its great Author.'

Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, V. ii. page 220.

soothe men's vices, to assert their errors, to defend their superstitions, or to promote their temporal interests, we might easily have accounted for its prevalence in the world. Had its preachers been very profound philosophers, or polite and fashionable orators, many might have been charmed with their discourses, and engaged, at least for a while, to follow them. Had the princes and potentates of the earth declared themselves its patrons, and armed their legions for its defence and propagation, multitudes might have been induced to make an external profession of it, though none could, by such means, have been rationally persuaded to the belief of its doctrines.

But without some such advantages as these, we can hardly conceive how any new religion should so strangely prevail; even though it had crept into the world in its darkest ages, and most barbarous countries; and though it had been gradually proposed in the most artful manner, with the finest veil industriously drawn over those parts of it, which might, at the first view, have been supposed likely to hinder its general acceptance.

But the very reverse of all this was the case here. From the apparent constitution of christianity, the lusts and errors, the superstitions and interests of carnal men would immediately rise up against it, as a most irreconcilable enemy. It is certain, that the learning and wit of the *Greeks* and the *Romans* were early employed to overbear and ridicule it. As all the herd of heathen deities were to be discarded, the priests, who subsisted on that craft, must, on the foot of interest, find themselves obliged to oppose it with all their influence. We are well assured, that the princes of the earth drew their
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swords against it, and armed torments and death for the destruction of its followers.

And yet we see that it triumphed over all.* Though published in ages and places of the greatest learning and refinement; and proposed, not in an ornamented and artificial manner, but with great plainness of speech, it was counted worthy of all acceptance. The doctrine of the cross was always avowed as the leading and fundamental doctrine of the gospel, though this was a stumbling-block to the *Jews*, and foolishness to the *Greeks*; and the absolute necessity of renouncing all idolatrous worship, was insisted on immediately, and in the strongest terms; though it must, at that period, make the religion of Jesus appear the most singular and unsociable religion which had ever been taught in the world.

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* *Tertullian* appeals to the governors of the *Roman* empire in these terms; 'We are but of yesterday, and we have filled your cities, islands, towns and boroughs, the camp, the senate, and the forum. They (the heathen adversaries of christianity) lament that every sex, age and condition, and persons of every rank also, are converts to that name.'

Tertull. Apol. Cap. 37.

'Now,' says *Jerome*, 'the passion and resurrection of Christ are celebrated in the discourses and writings of all nations. I need not mention *Jews*, *Greeks* and *Latins*. The *Indians*, *Persians*, *Goths* and *Egyptians* firmly believe the immortality of the soul, and future recompences. The fierceness of *Thracians* and *Scythians* is now softened by the gentle sound of the gospel; and every where Christ is all in all.'

Jerom. Ep. 8. ad Heliod.

Had one of the wits or politicians of the present age seen the apostles, and a few other plain men, who had been educated among the lowest of the people, as most of the first teachers of christianity were, going out armed with nothing but truth, faith, and love, to encounter the power of princes, the bigotry of priests, the learning of philosophers, the rage of the populace, and the prejudices of all; how would he have derided the attempt, and said with *Sanballat*, "What will these feeble *Jews* do?" But had he seen the event, surely he must have owned that it was the finger of God; and might justly have fallen on his face, even amongst those whom he had insulted, with an humble acknowledgment, that *God was in them of a truth*.

When persons of mean extraction, of no human learning, but poor in this world, obscure and friendless, are employed in the great work of establishing the kingdom of Christ through the world, nothing can follow but disappointment and shame, scorn and ridicule, unless the divine presence be with them, which can give strength to weakness, wisdom to ignorance, and accomplish the most important purposes by the most unpromising means and instruments. Thus, God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.

CHAP. V.

The Evidence arising from the Persecutions, which the primitive Christians endured for their Religion.

THE first witnesses to the truth of the gospel, according to what their divine Master had given them reason to expect, freely sacrificed their lives in the cause they had so much at heart, and sealed their testimony with their blood. It has been said, that almost all sects have their martyrs; and it is true, that men may suffer in defence of mistaken opinions, and wrong notions. But the case of the apostles of Christ was very different.

They suffered in behalf of facts; in confirmation of the testimony which they gave, of what they had seen with their own eyes, and heard with their own ears, respecting that adorable Person on whom all their faith and hope were founded. In bearing their testimony for him they persisted, and for this they died. But no man, no not even the greatest enthusiast, will lay down his life in confirmation of facts which he knows to be false.

The danger, to which the apostles of Christ exposed themselves, proceeded in a measure from the sudden bursts of violence at particular places, from the licentiousness of the populace, the rashness of some magistrates, and the negligence of others; and, in general, from the variety and warmth of opinion, which a doctrine so new and extraordinary, as that which they taught, could not fail to excite.

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Some length of time might pass, before the vast machine of the *Roman* empire would be put in motion, or its attention be obtained to religious controversy, as a judicious writer observes; but during that time a great deal of ill usage might be endured, by a set of friendless, unprotected travellers, telling men, wherever they came, that the religion of their ancestors, the religion in which they had been brought up, the religion of the state, and of the magistrate, the rites which they frequented, the pomp which they admired, were throughout a system of folly and delusion.

The Mahometan imposture was propagated at a time when universal ignorance and barbarism had prepared mankind to receive, without hesitation, any impressions from the artful and designing. But christianity was proposed in an age, which, perhaps above all others, was distinguished for curious speculation, and philosophical research.

The *Roman* empire was at that time in its full glory; and a long and profound peace, together with the patronage and encouragement of authority, had contributed to raise the arts and sciences to a height unknown before; and which later ages, with all their boasted improvements, have scarce been able to exceed. At such a period did the religion of Jesus invite, and endure the test of the severest scrutiny, till, at length, like pure gold, it came forth un sullied, and undiminished from the flames.

The religion which the apostles of Christ were zealous to promote, as Archdeacon PALEY justly observes, was exclusive. It denied, without reserve, the truth of every article of heathen mythology, the existence of every object of their worship. It accepted no compromise. It must prevail, if it pre-

prevailed at all, by the overthrow of every statue, altar and temple in the world. It will not easily be credited, that a design, so bold as this was, could in any age be attempted to be carried into execution, without great difficulty and danger. Christianity pronounced all the idols of the heathens to be false, and all the worship paid to them to be vain.

Under this head, a quotation from *Tacitus*, well known to every scholar, must be inserted, as deserving particular attention. The passage was written about seventy years after the crucifixion of Christ, and it relates to transactions which took place about thirty years after that event. Speaking of the fire which happened at *Rome*, in the time of *Nero*, and of the suspicions which were entertained that the cruel emperor himself was concerned in causing it, the historian thus proceeds in his narrative and observations :

‘ But neither these exertions, nor his gifts to the people, nor his offerings to the gods, removed the infamous imputation under which *Nero* lay, of having ordered the city to be set on fire. To put an end therefore to this report, he laid the guilt, and inflicted the most cruel punishments upon a set of people who were held in abhorrence for their crimes, and called *christians* by the vulgar. The founder of that name was Christ, who suffered death in the reign of *Tiberius*, under his procurator, *Pontius Pilate*.

This pernicious superstition, thus checked for a while, broke out again; and spread, not only over *Judea*, where the evil originated, but through *Rome* also, whither every thing bad upon earth finds its way, and is practised. Some who confessed their sect were first seized, and afterwards,
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by their information, a vast multitude were apprehended; who were convicted, not so much of the crime of burning *Rome*, as of hatred to mankind. Their sufferings at their execution were aggravated by insult and mockery; for some were disguised in the skins of wild beasts, and worried to death by dogs.—Some were crucified.—And others were wrapt in pitched shirts, and set on fire when the day closed, that they might serve as lights to illuminate the night.

‘*Nero* lent his own gardens for these executions; and exhibited, at the same time, a mock Circensian entertainment, being a spectator of the whole, in the dress of a charioteer; sometimes mingling with the crowd on foot, and sometimes viewing the spectacles from his car. This conduct made the sufferers pitied; and though they were criminals, and deserving the severest punishment, yet they were considered as sacrificed, not so much out of a regard to the public good, as to gratify the cruelty of one man.’

The reader will remember, while he reviews the above-cited passage, that it is the language of an enemy, who entertained very unjust ideas both of christianity, and of those who suffered in support of the good cause.

Juvenal, commemorating the cruelties exercised under *Nero*’s government, is thought to have the suffering christians in view, in a passage we meet with in one of his satires, which is to the following purpose:

— ‘You shall suffer the same punishment with those who stand burning in their own flame and smoke, their head being held up by a stake fixed

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to their chin, till they make a long stream of blood and melted sulphur on the ground.'

Martial, as was usual with him in other cases, has made the sufferings of the christians the subject of his ridicule. But from what this poet and other heathen writers say on this head, it is plain, that the christians, who were put to death for their religion, were martyrs in the strictest sense; their sufferings were so voluntary, that it was in their power, at the time when the sentence was pronounced upon them, to have saved their lives, by consenting to join in the acts of idolatrous worship. — I do not encumber these pages by inserting quotations from these authors in the language in which they wrote, because, to the learned they are well known, and to others such quotations would be of no service.

From most of the heathen writers who have touched on the sufferings of the christians, it appears, that they endured all the tortures inflicted upon them with great firmness and constancy. But to these noble christian virtues, the hard names of madness, obstinacy and fashion, or habit, were given by those who knew no better.

Thus *Epictetus* asks, 'Is it possible that a man may arrive at this temper, and become indifferent to those things, from madness or from habit, as the *Galileans*?'

And *Marcus Aurelius*, 'Let this preparation of the mind [for death] arise from its own judgment, and not from obstinacy, like the christians.'

All the evangelists represent our Divine Saviour as foretelling the persecutions to which his followers should be exposed for his sake.

Then

“ Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you, and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. They shall lay hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. And ye shall be betrayed both by parents and brethren, and kinsfolks and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. The time cometh, that he that killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them.”

The sacred book, which bears the name of the New Testament, abounds with exhortations to patience under persecution, and with suitable topics of consolation for those who are under the fiery trial.

“ We are troubled,” say the champions in the christian cause, “ yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.—Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise us up also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.—For which cause we faint not, but, though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

“ Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of

suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of *Job*, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

“ Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings. Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”

Perhaps the reader will not be displeased with the following extract from an epistle of *Clement*, relating to the persecutions which the christians underwent in his days. The apostle *Paul* mentions this person among his fellow-labourers, in the fourth chapter of his epistle to the *Philippians*:—“ With *Clement* also, and with other my fellow-labourers, whose names are in the book of life :” There is extant a letter of his to the *Corinthian* church, in which are the following passages :

‘ Let us take the examples of our own age. Through zeal and envy, the most faithful and righteous pillars of the church, have been persecuted even to the most grievous deaths. Let us set before our eyes the holy apostles. *Peter*, by unjust envy, underwent not one or two, but many sufferings; till at last being martyred, he went to the place of glory that was due unto him. For the same cause did *Paul*, in like manner, receive the reward of his patience. Seven times he was in bonds; he was whipped, he was stoned. He preached both in the east and in the west, leaving behind him the glorious report of his faith; and so having taught
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the whole world righteousness, and for that end travelled even to the utmost bounds of the west, he at last suffered martyrdom by the command of the governors, and departed out of the world, and went unto his holy place, having become a most eminent pattern of patience unto all ages.

‘To these holy apostles were joined a very great number of others, who, having through envy undergone, in like manner, many pains and torments, have left a glorious example to us. For this, not only men, but women, have been persecuted; and, having suffered very grievous and heavy punishments, have finished the course of their faith with firmness.’

Such numbers of the followers of Jesus were put to death for his sake, in the three first centuries, that, to an eye of reason, it might appear highly probable the whole race of christians would be soon extinct. From the writers of those times we may conclude, that more suffered death for the cause of Christ, than were ever known to be cut off in the same compass of time, by war, pestilence, or famine. Some were buried alive; some crucified; some devoured by wild beasts; some consumed by fire; some slain with the sword; and others tortured in a manner which cannot be thought of without horror.

But all this savage cruelty, which continued, with some short intervals of rest and tranquillity, almost to the days of *Constantine*, was so far from deterring men from the profession of christianity, or from diminishing the number of christians, that the blood of the martyrs might very justly be said to have been the seed of the rising church.

The conversion of so many to the christian faith, who laid down their lives for him whom having

not seen they loved, in whatever way we consider it, abounds with proofs of the truth of the gospel. The courage and constancy, with which the first christians underwent all that human nature shuns and fears, are astonishing. Even women and young persons suffered with unshaken resolution, tortures, the very recital of which would make one shudder. Most certainly, that God, to whose cause they gave testimony by their blood, supported them in the fiery trial, and enabled them to glory in tribulation.

In a letter written by the church at *Smyrna*, soon after the martyrdom of *Polycarp*, who had been the companion of *John the divine*, we find the following interesting passage :

‘ The sufferings of all the other martyrs were blessed and glorious, which they underwent according to the will of God. For so it becomes us, to ascribe the power and ordering of all things to him. And, indeed, who can chuse but admire the greatness of their minds, and that admirable patience and love of their Master, which then appeared in them? Who, when they were so flayed with whipping, that the frame and structure of their bodies were laid open to their very inward arteries, nevertheless endured it. In like manner, those who were condemned to the beasts, and kept a long time in prison, underwent many cruel torments; being forced to lie upon sharp spikes laid under their bodies, and tormented with divers other sorts of punishments; that so, if it were possible, the tyrant, by the length of their sufferings, might have brought them to deny Christ.’

CHAP. VI.

Concluding Remarks.

WE have presented the reader, as was proposed, with a summary of the evidences of christianity, and in doing that, we have taken a short survey of the principal facts recorded in the New Testament. Let us now endeavour to bring the matter to an issue.

Can we suppose the reporters of the facts which have been mentioned, did themselves certainly know that they were false? If so, we must suppose, that thousands of others who were eye-witnesses of them, did also certainly know that they were mere fictions and fables. For they were as capable of determining with certainty as were the apostles themselves, whether they had seen the facts which were reported or not. On this supposition, as an *American* writer * observes, all *Jerusalem* and *Judea* must assuredly have known, that they never saw any such transactions as are recorded in the gospel history.

They must have known, in particular, that they never saw any thing of what took place on the day of *Pentecost*; as the visible descent of the Holy Ghost, and the consequences which followed.

The several churches established throughout the world, must, on this supposition, have known, that they saw no miracles wrought by the apostles, in confirmation of their mission, and that they never knew any thing about those miraculous gifts which

* Dickenson.

are reported to have been so common among themselves. And it must be supposed, on the ground above-mentioned, that all these conspired in the deceit, to the utter subversion of the different systems of religion in which they had been educated. It must be supposed, that multitudes of these men united in this fraud, at the expence of their honour, their estates, and their lives; and that not an individual among them all stood forth to discover the villainy of this procedure. At the same time, let it be considered, that there could be no motive whatever to induce all these myriads of people to unite their efforts in support of such fraud as is supposed. Can we imagine, that, without hoping to gain any advantage by this conduct, they would have quietly and willingly submitted to the most cruel usage, to the greatest hardships, and even to all that is shocking and terrible to human nature, rather than contradict and disprove what they knew to be false? No man, surely, in the sober exercise of his reason, can imagine, for one moment, that the whole body of professing christians knew, that all that they did, and all that they suffered were in support of an imposture.

To propagate a false religion, knowing it to be so, would be the greatest piece of villainy of which a man can be guilty. If the evangelists did certainly know, that their narratives of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were false, it must follow, that a set of the vilest and most wicked men that ever lived upon earth, drew up the best system of practical religion, the most honourable to God, and the most suitable and safe for man, that ever was proposed. It must follow, that, contrary to their inward principles, they walked according to the rules

rules of this system themselves, and set the best examples before others. That without any known motive whatsoever, they spent their whole lives in a continued course of the greatest toil, fatigue and affliction, that ever men did, to promote this holy religion, to impress it on the minds of others, and to engage them, according to it, to live in the love and fear of God. Can this, for one moment, be supposed possible to be done, by men of such wicked principles as they must have been possessed of, if they knew that they were propagating lies in the name of God?

Can it be thought that such men would not only give up all hope of future happiness, but all prospect of ease, tranquillity and pleasure in this world, in the vindication of a known falsehood? That to this end they would expose themselves to the greatest dangers, and to the most cruel death, without the least possible advantage here or hereafter? For they could not but know that they were putting themselves, and leading their followers into the hands of powerful and cruel enemies, without any prospect beyond the grave (supposing that they were deceivers) but that of certain perdition. We cannot imagine or suspect them to have been impostors, without supposing them, at the same time, to have acted continually in direct opposition to all their interests, their comforts, and their hopes; and, in a word, to have run counter to all the principles of humanity, and to all the common springs of action which were ever known among rational beings.

Will it then be said, that the writers of the gospel history, and all those who were spectators of what they record, had their senses imposed upon,
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and were deceived? If this be granted, no evidence of any transaction whatsoever can deserve regard. The apostles daily saw the miracles of their Divine Master performed before their eyes. Attending multitudes saw the wounded made whole, the sick healed, the lepers cleansed, and the dead raised. They beheld these wonders repeated again and again, for a long tract of time. The witnesses of our Lord's resurrection saw him after his death, they ate and drank with him, they conversed familiarly with him for the space of forty days, and they beheld him ascend up into heaven. If we suppose the whole a deception, we must at the same time conclude that there can be no certainty of any thing, and that our senses can be of no service to us. It is as reasonable to imagine, that our whole life, from our infancy to the present moment is not a reality but a dream. Arguments, reasonings, proofs and evidences, upon any subject, must stand for nothing with people of so incredulous and obstinate a turn of mind.

The early writers against christianity had not the boldness of our modern infidels. They did not attempt to deny the facts on which the system is founded. They could not have wanted advantages or inclination to have detected any fraud or deceit, if any could have been found. But the important transactions in question are verified by evidences which cannot be resisted, and by which none can be deceived who will pay proper attention to them.

The matter plainly comes to this issue. If the gospel history be not true, then all the known laws of nature were changed. All the known motives
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and incentives to human actions have been inverted. The vilest men that ever existed in the world have taken the greatest pains, and endured the greatest hardships to invent, to propagate, and to exemplify, in their own practice, with the strictest uniformity and unanimity, the most holy and divine system of religion that ever was proposed to the attention of mankind. And not only the apostles and others in their day, but whole nations of men, and even of all sorts of men, *Jews*, christians, and pagans, have entered into a confederacy to support a known cheat, against their own credit, their own interest and safety. Yea, multitudes of men, without any prospect of advantage here or hereafter, have been brought strenuously and tenaciously to profess what they knew to be false; to exchange the comforts and pleasures of life, for shame, reproach, banishment, scourgings, imprisonment, tortures and death; and, in one word, to expose themselves to the hatred of God and man, without any motive whatever.

I do not pretend, in this small work, to have touched upon all the variety of evidences which have been adduced in proof of christianity, and ably urged by different writers. What has been advanced, I should think sufficient to satisfy any unprejudiced mind. No other historical fact whatever is supported by proofs like these.—No other religious system, which at any period of time has been proposed to the world, ever bore credentials which would admit of any kind of comparison with these. I must own, it seems to me absolutely impossible that so many different kinds of proofs, and all so strong, should
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have lent their concurrent aid, as a celebrated Author expresses himself, and have united their joint force in the establishment of a falsehood.

He who doubts of the truth of christianity, and yet seeks not to be resolved, is equally unhappy and unjust, as *Monf. Pascal* has observed. But if, at the same time, he appears easy and composed, if he freely declares his indifference; nay, if he professes it with vanity, and seems to make this deplorable condition the matter of his diversion, I know not what name to give so extravagant a creature. How is it possible for a rational being to indulge himself in such an horrible disposition! What delight is there in jesting about everlasting misery! What bravery is there in a man's willingly involving himself in impenetrable darkness! Or what consolation in being indifferent about that which is the only source of comfort?

I am fully persuaded, that the reason why some pretend to disbelieve the truth of Christianity, is not for want of sufficient evidence, as they would insinuate; but from other causes. Mr. WILBERFORCE, in his excellent work, lately published, gives us a striking view of the progress of infidelity. I shall beg leave to cite a few sentences: — ‘From the account here given, it appears plainly, that infidelity is generally the offspring of prejudice; and that its success is mainly to be ascribed to the depravity of the moral character. This fact is confirmed by the undeniable truth, that in *societies*, which consist of individuals, infidelity is the natural fruit, not so much of a studious and disputatious, as of a dissipated and vicious age. It diffuses itself in proportion as the general morals decline; and it is embraced with less apprehension,

prehesion when every infidel is left in spirits, by seeing many around him who are sharing fortunes with himself.

To any fair mind, this consideration alone might be offered, as suggesting a strong argument against infidelity, and in favour of revelation. And the friends of christianity might justly retort the charge, which their opponents often urge with no little affectation of superior wisdom; that we implicitly surrender ourselves to the influence of prejudice, instead of examining dispassionately the ground of our faith, and yielding our assent only according to the degree of evidence.

In our own days, when it is but too clear that infidelity increases, it is not in consequence of the reasonings of the infidel writers having been much studied; but from the progress of luxury, and the decay of morals. And, so far as this increase may be traced at all to sceptical writers, it has been produced, not by argument and discussion, but by sarcasms and points of wit, which have operated on weak minds, or on nominal christians, by bringing gradually into contempt, opinions which, in their case, had only rested on the basis of blind respect, and the prejudices of education.

It may therefore be laid down as an axiom, that *infidelity is in general a disease of the heart more than of the understanding*. If revelation were assailed only by reason and argument, it would have little to fear. The literary opposers of christianity, from *Herbert* to *Hume*, have been seldom read. They made some stir in their day. During their span of existence they were noisy and noxious; but, like the locusts of the east, which for a while obscure the air, and destroy the verdure, they were

soon swept away and forgotten; their very names would be scarcely found, if *Leland* had not preserved them from oblivion.'

The first step towards believing the truth of the christian religion, is a hope that it may be true. And who would not entertain such a hope? It is certainly for the interest of all, yea, even of the worst men in the world, that it should be true; because it is the only system which can give them any ground to expect, on repentance, the pardon of their crimes, and reconciliation with the offended Majesty of heaven. The punishment of sin is a debt due to justice, which cannot be remitted without compensation: repentance can be no compensation; it is a change of the sinner's mind, attended with a corresponding change of conduct; but it cannot wash away sin. If any man, by extravagance, contracts a debt, repentance may induce him to act with more caution in future; but it can never pay off his old arrears, for which he must ever be accountable, unless they are discharged by himself, or some other person in his stead. This very discharge christianity alone holds forth, through the mediation of its Divine Author. It makes the most liberal proclamation to the vilest of the human race, "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of *Moses*."

The gospel exactly suits the case of guilty, miserable, helpless men. But let none dare to reject so divine a remedy. In doing that, all ground of hope would be given up at once. "Beware therefore lest that come upon you which is spoken of
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in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye will in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you."

There is no evidence of the truth of christianity so satisfactory to a man's own soul, as the inward experience of the power of the gospel in its enlightening, quickening, and sanctifying influence. He who feels his heart so effectually wrought upon by the constraining energy of the divine word, as to be turned by it from darkness to light, and from the power of satan to God, will be able to say, against all the sophistical insinuations of infidels, with the man whose eyes had been miraculously opened by Christ, "This one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." As such, he will be ready to despise the subtle objections which may be raised against the blessed gospel. He cannot doubt, but that the word of truth, by which he has been begotten again to a lively hope, is that very word of God which is able to make men wise to salvation. He that believeth hath the witness in himself. And it is possible there may be seasons of darkness and temptation in which the christian will find this to be the surest support of his hope.

I shall now leave my readers to their own reflections on this important subject; humbly entreating that Almighty Saviour, whose cause I have attempted to plead, to give his blessing to my feeble endeavours, so that his glory may thereby be promoted, and his followers be confirmed in their faith in his name, and in their warm and steady attachment to his interest. As for those who obstinately shut their eyes against the light, I sincerely pity them. Their condition is deplorable. But what
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if some do not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God, or the truth which he has so clearly revealed, without effect? God forbid. He has furnished us with every kind of evidence that we can reasonably desire. For my own part, I solemnly declare, I should not know how to form a wish for other proofs of the truth of the christian religion, than those which God has given. To his name be everlasting honour. Amen.



